

International Spiritual Life Commission Report

The Salvation Army has a God-given freedom in Christ which, if used to the full, could enrich the Army's spiritual life and total ministry in ways far beyond those already enjoyed.

This freedom should never be underestimated, undervalued, or neglected, but be warmly embraced and positively engaged to the glory of God and for the extension of his Kingdom. It is firmly rooted in the Army's tradition, has always been at the heart of its most inspiring and effective initiatives, and points the way ahead for what God has planned for his people.

This is the conviction of the International Spiritual Life Commission, convened by the General to examine and identify aspects of the Army's life which are essential or integral to the spiritual growth of individual Salvationists and the movement itself.

In its five week-long meetings the Commission became increasingly aware both of the rich cultural diversity possessed by the Army in the 104 countries in which it is working, and of the unifying power found in its shared universal beliefs and practices.

The commission also took note of the correspondence, papers, suggestions and support given by fellow Salvationists who took up the world-wide opportunity to share in this challenging and exciting task.

Among aspects Salvationists confirmed as integral to the Army's life were its ministry to the unchurched, the priesthood of all believers (total mobilization), personal salvation, holiness of life, the use of the mercy seat, and social ministry (unreservedly given).

It was when giving consideration to practices of other churches that the value of the Army's freedom in Christ was particularly evident. The setting of fixed forms of words or acts is not part of Salvationist tradition, though the value placed upon them by some other denominations is recognized.

A great deal of time, prayer and consultation was given to examining the value of introducing or reintroducing a form of holy communion. In addition to considering the large amount of correspondence on the subject, the Commission held a number of Bible studies, gave time to further prayer and also arranged for the visit of a former chairman of the Church of England's Doctrine Commission. Many points of view of various persuasions and convictions were considered, and the members of the Commission itself helpfully reflected those differences. Although such differences still exist, the Commission has been able to present its recommendations in a spirit of unity and harmony, recognizing the vast potential for innovative worship and ministry within the freedom which the Army already enjoys in Christ.

Sacraments

It was recognized that the forms of worship used by Christians of the early Church (including the common meal) were not known as sacraments, yet the importance of keeping Christ's atoning sacrifice at the center of its corporate worship has always been vital to the spiritual life of the Army. Recognizing the freedom to celebrate Christ's real presence at all meals and in all meetings, the Commission's statement on Holy Communion encourages - Salvationists to use the opportunity to explore together the significance of the simple meals shared by Jesus and his friends, and by the first Christians. It also encourages the development of resources for such events, which would vary according to culture, without ritualizing particular words or actions.

The Army's long-held beliefs that no particular outward observance is necessary to inward grace, and that God's grace is freely and readily accessible to all people at all times and in all places were unanimously reaffirmed, as was every Salvationist's freedom to share in communion services conducted in other Christian gatherings.

When considering the subject of baptism the Commission recognized the scriptural truth that there is one body and one Spirit . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all' (Ephesians 4:5-6). All who are in Christ are baptized into the one body by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:12-13).

Swearing-in

There are many ways in which Christians publicly witness to having been baptized into Christ's body. Water baptism is one of them, but the ceremony, like that of the swearing-in of a Salvation Army soldier, is essentially a witness to the life-changing encounter with Christ which has already happened. The ceremony itself is not the encounter and should not be confused with the act of becoming a Christian. Bearing this in mind, the Commission recommends that the Soldier's Covenant, signed by new soldiers, should incorporate reference to each soldier's baptism into - Christ by the Holy Spirit at the moment of conversion.

Specific recommendations made by the Commission to the General highlight ways in which preaching and teaching of the word of God should be given prominence. They encourage cultural expressions of worship and give special emphasis to Bible study, education and training. The importance of Salvationists being better informed and more adequately educated on matters of faith was frequently highlighted in the Commission's deliberations.

There is also a strong recommendation that Army leadership at every level should conform to the biblical model of servant leadership. To assist with this, a re-evaluation of structures, ranks and systems is urged, as is the need to make spirituality an essential quality and qualification for leadership in the movement. Training and development of officers and local officers to assist their spiritual development is also regarded as a priority.

Study

In addition to making recommendations at the General's request for his consideration (together with the Army's international leaders), the Commission makes a Call to Salvationists world-wide to recognize that any outward movement of love for the world requires first of all an inward movement from each Christian towards God. The vitality of our spiritual life as a movement will be seen and tested in our turning to the world in evangelism and service, but the springs of our spiritual life are to be found in our turning to God in worship, in the disciplines of life in the Spirit, and in the study of God's word,' it says. Twelve specific calls are made, together with complementary affirmations (See separate list).

In the Call the Commission expresses its belief that each Salvationist's equipping for spiritual warfare must come from God and be rooted in the conviction of the triumph of Christ. The living out of the Christian life in all its dimensions personal, relational, social and political can only be achieved by embracing Christ's lordship and the Holy Spirit's enabling.

The Commission has recognized the impossibility of providing (and the foolishness of attempting to provide) guidelines and strategies that would suit all countries and cultures in which the Army operates. One of the Army's greatest strengths is its diversity of culture, methods and resources.

Nevertheless, the Commission is ready to assist with relevant resourcing by providing material that can be used for teaching, clarifying and supporting fellow Salvationists as they respond to a new and revitalized recognition of what God can do in and through his Army by his Spirit and in the freedom which Christ gives.

WORSHIP

The Meeting

1. We affirm that God invites us to a meeting in which God is present, God speaks, and God acts. In our meetings we celebrate and experience the promised presence of Christ with his people. Christ crucified, risen and glorified is the focal point, the epicenter of our worship. We offer worship to the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit, in our own words, in acts which engage our whole being: body, soul and mind. We sing the ancient song of creation to its Creator, we sing the new song of the redeemed to their Redeemer. We hear proclaimed the word of redemption, the call to mission, and the promise of life in the Spirit.

Preaching

2. We affirm that when the gospel is preached God speaks. The Bible is the written word of God. Preaching is that same word opened, read, proclaimed, and explained. When in our human weakness and foolishness we faithfully proclaim and explain the word, the world may hear and see a new thing; God speaks and God acts. To respond in obedient faith results in a decisive encounter with God. We affirm that God speaks profound truth in simple words, common language, and potent metaphor, and we confess that at times our words, too often shallow, obscure, archaic or irrelevant, have veiled, not revealed, our God.

The Mercy Seat

3. We affirm that the mercy seat in our meetings symbolizes God's unremitting call to his people to meet with him. It is not only a place for repentance and forgiveness, but also a place for communion and commitment. Here we may experience a deep awareness of God's abundant grace and claim his boundless salvation. The mercy seat may be used by anyone, at any time, and particularly in Army meetings when, in response to the proclaimed word, all are invited to share loving and humble communion with the Lord.

The Hallowing of Meals

4. We affirm that the Lord Jesus Christ is the one true sacrament of God. His incarnation and continuing gracious presence with his people by means of the indwelling Holy Spirit is the mystery at the heart of our faith. We hear our Lord's command to remember his broken body and his outpoured blood as in our families and in our faith communities we eat and drink together. We affirm that our meals and love feasts are an anticipation of the feasts of eternity, and a participation in that fellowship which is the Body of Christ on earth.

Soldiership

5. We affirm that Jesus Christ still calls men and women to take up their cross and follow him. This wholehearted and absolute acceptance of Christ as Lord is a costly discipleship. We hear our Lord's command to make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We believe that soldiership is discipleship and that the public swearing-in of a soldier of The Salvation Army beneath the Army's Trinitarian flag fulfills this command. It is a public response and witness to the life-changing encounter with Christ which has already taken place, as is the believers' water baptism practiced by some other Christians.

THE DISCIPLINES OF LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

The Disciplines of the Inner Life

6. We affirm that the consistent cultivation of the inner life is essential for our faith life and for our fighting fitness. The disciplines of the inner life include solitude, prayer and meditation, study, and self-denial. Practicing solitude, spending time alone with God, we discover the importance of silence, learn to listen to God, and discover our true selves. Praying, we engage in a unique dialogue that encompasses adoration and confession, petition and intercession. As we meditate we attend to God's transforming word. As we study we train our minds towards Christlikeness, allowing the word of God to shape our thinking. Practicing self-denial, we focus on God and grow in spiritual perception. We expose how our appetites can control us, and draw closer in experience, empathy and action to those who live with deprivation and scarcity.

The Disciplines of our Life Together

7. We affirm the unique fellowship of Salvationists worldwide. Our unity in the Holy Spirit is characterized by our shared vision, mission and joyful service. In our life together we share responsibility for one another's spiritual well-being. The vitality of our spiritual life is also enhanced by our accountability to one another, and when we practice the discipline of accountability our spiritual vision becomes objective, our decisions more balanced, and we gain the wisdom of the fellowship and the means to clarify and test our own thinking. Such spiritual direction may be provided effectively through a group or by an individual. Mutual accountability also provides the opportunity to confess failure or sin and receive the assurance of forgiveness and hope in Christ.

The Disciplines of our Life in the World

8. We affirm that commitment to Christ requires the offering of our lives in simplicity, submission and service. Practicing simplicity we become people whose witness to the world is expressed by the values we live by, as well as by the message we proclaim. This leads to service which is a self-giving for the salvation and healing of a hurting world, as well as a prophetic witness in the face of social injustice.

TRAINING IN GOD'S WORD

Cultivating faith

9. We affirm that our mission demands the formation of a soldiery which is maturing, and is being equipped for faithful life and ministry in the world. In strategic and supportive partnership with the family, the Christian community has a duty to provide opportunities for growth into maturity by means of preaching and teaching, through worship and fellowship, and by healing and helping.

Teaching holiness

10. We affirm that God continues to desire and to command that his people be holy. For this Christ died, for this Christ rose again, for this the Spirit was given. We therefore determine to claim as God's gracious gift that holiness which is ours in Christ. We confess that at times we have failed to realize the practical consequences of the call to holiness within our relationships, within our communities and within our movement. We resolve to make every effort to embrace holiness of life, knowing that this is only possible by means of the power of the Holy Spirit producing his fruit in us.

Equipping for war

11. We affirm that Christ our Lord calls us to join him in holy war against evil in all its forms and against every power that stands against the reign of God. We fight in the power of the Spirit in the assurance of ultimate and absolute victory through Christ's redemptive work. We reject extreme attitudes towards the demonic: on the one hand, denial; on the other, obsession. We affirm that the Body of Christ is equipped for warfare and service through the gifts of the Spirit. By these we are strengthened and empowered. We heed the injunction of Scripture to value all God's gifts, and rejoice in their diversity.

Helping the family

12. We affirm that the family plays a central role in passing on the faith. We also recognize that families everywhere are subject to dysfunction and disintegration in an increasingly urbanized world in which depersonalization, insignificance, loneliness and alienation are widespread. We believe that in the home where Christ's Lordship is acknowledged, and the family is trained in God's word, a spiritually enriching and strengthening environment is provided.

Fellowship Meals

Recognizing that every meal may be hallowed, whether in the home or with a congregation, there are strategic occasions when the planning of a fellowship meal may especially enrich corporate spiritual life. Such occasions could include the following:

- In preparation for and during the Easter period.
- At the beginning of a mission or spiritual campaign.
- At a corps celebration such as an anniversary, a New Year's Eve watchnight service, or the opening of a new building.
- At a soldiers' meeting.
- For the census board or corps council, particularly when important decisions need to be made.
- For the launching of the Annual Appeal when the significance of work/service being undertaken in Christ's name could be emphasized.
- Harvest thanksgiving.
- Between meetings when a meal is required and members of the congregation are unable to travel home to eat because of distance.
- When there has been a breakdown in relationships and healing is sought by reflecting on Christ's great act of reconciliation through the Cross.
- Whenever it is thought that such a gathering would strengthen the spiritual life and wider fellowship of the corps or center.
- Small group meetings, especially house groups, mid-week meetings or (for example) at the conclusion of a recruits' preparation for soldiership course.
- Corps camps, fellowship weekends or retreats.

Two features of the common fellowship meal in the early New Testament Church were the scope for spontaneity and the element of charity, with the poor being included. These elements are also worth noting.

Members of the International Spiritual Life Commission

The following officers and soldiers were appointed by the General to serve as members of the International Spiritual Life Commission:

Lieut-Colonel Robert Street (Chairman), Lieut-Colonel Earl Robinson (Secretary), Lieut-Colonel Linda Bond, Captain Teofilo Chagas, Commissioner Doreen Edwards, Dr Roger Green, Lieut-Colonel Margaret Hay, Miss Susan Harris, CSM Warren Johnson, Lieut-Colonel David Lofgren, Colonel Emmanuel Miaglia, Lieut-Colonel Stuart Mungate, Colonel Phil Needham, Major Lyell Rader, Captain John Read, Captain Oscar Sanchez, and Major N. M. Vijayalakshmi.

Corresponding members who also attended some of the Commission's deliberations were:

Commissioner Ian Cutmore (former Chairman), Colonel Shaw Clifton, Major Ian Barr and Envoy William van Graan.

Other corresponding members who assisted:

Lieut-Colonel David Kim, Chong-won, Colonel Douglas Davis, Commissioner Peter Chang and Recruiting Sergeant John Bayliss.

The Commission met for five separate weeks.

A Statement on Baptism

After full and careful consideration of The Salvation Army's understanding of, and approach to, the sacrament of water baptism, the International Spiritual Life Commission sets out the following points regarding the relationship between our soldier enrolment and water baptism.

1. Only those who confess Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord may be considered for soldiership in The Salvation Army.
2. Such a confession is confirmed by the gracious presence of God the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer and includes the call to discipleship.
3. In accepting the call to discipleship Salvationists promise to continue to be responsive to the Holy Spirit and to seek to grow in grace.
4. They also express publicly their desire to fulfill membership of Christ's Church on earth as soldiers of The Salvation Army.
5. The Salvation Army rejoices in the truth that all who are in Christ are baptized into the one body by the Holy Spirit (1Corinthians 12:13).
6. It believes, in accordance with Scripture, that there is one body and one Spirit . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all' (Ephesians 4:5-6).
7. The swearing-in of a soldier of The Salvation Army beneath the trinitarian sign of the Army's flag acknowledges this truth.
8. It is a public response and witness to a life-changing encounter with Christ which has already taken place, as is the water baptism practiced by some other Christians.
9. The Salvation Army acknowledges that there are many worthy ways of publicly witnessing to having been baptized into Christ's body by the Holy Spirit and expressing a desire to be his disciple.
10. The swearing-in of a soldier should be followed by a lifetime of continued obedient faith in Christ.

A Statement on Holy Communion

After full and careful consideration of The Salvation Army's understanding of, and approach to, the sacrament of Holy Communion*, the International Spiritual Life Commission sets out the following points:

1. God's grace is freely and readily accessible to all people at all times and in all places.
2. No particular outward observance is necessary to inward grace.
3. The Salvation Army believes that unity of the Spirit exists within diversity and rejoices in the freedom of the Spirit in expressions of worship.
4. When Salvationists attend other Christian gatherings in which a form of Holy Communion is included, they may partake if they choose to do so and if the host Church allows.
5. Christ is the one true Sacrament, and sacramental living - Christ living in us and through us- is at the heart of Christian holiness and discipleship.
6. Throughout its history The Salvation Army has kept Christ's atoning sacrifice at the center of its corporate worship.
7. The Salvation Army rejoices in its freedom to celebrate Christ's real presence at all meals and in all meetings, and in its opportunity to explore in life together the significance of the simple meals shared by Jesus and his friends and by the first Christians.
8. Salvationists are encouraged to use the love feast and develop creative means of hallowing meals in home and corps with remembrance of the Lord's sacrificial love.
9. The Salvation Army encourages the development of resources for fellowship meals, which will vary according to culture, without ritualizing particular words or actions.
10. In accordance with normal Salvation Army practice, such remembrances and celebrations, where observed, will not become established rituals, nor will frequency be prescribed.

*Terminology varies according to culture and denomination, and is not always interchangeable.

A call to Salvationists

1. We call Salvationists worldwide to worship and proclaim the living God, and to seek in every meeting a vital encounter with the Lord of life, using relevant cultural forms and languages.
2. We call Salvationists worldwide to a renewed and relevant proclamation of and close attention to the word of God, and to a quick and steady obedience to the radical demands of the word upon Salvationists personally, and upon our movement corporately.
3. We call Salvationists worldwide to recognize the wide understanding of the mercy seat that God has given to the Army; to rejoice that Christ uses this means of grace to confirm his presence; and to ensure that its spiritual benefits are fully explored in every corps and Army center.
4. We call Salvationists worldwide to rejoice in our freedom to celebrate Christ's real presence at all our meals and in all our meetings, and to seize the opportunity to explore in our life together the significance of the simple meals shared by Jesus and his friends and by the first Christians.
5. We call Salvationists worldwide to recognize that the swearing-in of soldiers is a public witness to Christ's command to make disciples and that soldiership demands ongoing radical obedience.
6. We call Salvationists worldwide to enter the new millennium with a renewal of faithful, disciplined and persistent prayer; to study God's word consistently and to seek God's will earnestly; to deny self and to live a lifestyle of simplicity in a spirit of trust and thankfulness.

7. We call Salvationists worldwide to rejoice in their unique fellowship; to be open to support, guidance, nurture, affirmation and challenge from each other as members together of the body of Christ; and to participate actively and regularly in the life, membership and mission of a particular corps.
8. We call Salvationists worldwide to commit themselves and their gifts to the salvation of the world, and to embrace servanthood, expressing it through the joy of self-giving and the discipline of Christ-like living.
9. We call Salvationists worldwide to explore new ways to recruit and train people who are both spiritually mature and educationally competent; to develop learning programs and events that are biblically informed, culturally relevant, and educationally sound; and to create learning environments which encourage exploration, creativity, and diversity.
10. We call Salvationists worldwide to restate and live out the doctrine of holiness in all its dimensions personal, relational, social and political in the context of our cultures and in the idioms of our day while allowing for and indeed prizing such diversity of experience and expression as is in accord with the Scriptures.
11. We call Salvationists worldwide to join in the spiritual battle on the grounds of a sober reading of Scripture, a conviction of the triumph of Christ, the inviolable freedom and dignity of persons, and a commitment to the redemption of the world in all its dimensions physical, spiritual, social, economic and political.
12. We call Salvationists worldwide to restore the family to its central position in passing on the faith, to generate resources to help parents grow together in faithful love and to lead their children into wholeness, with hearts on fire for God and his mission.

The founders of The Salvation Army declared their belief that God raised up our movement to enter partnership with him in his great business' of saving the world. We call upon Salvationists worldwide to reaffirm our shared calling to this great purpose, as signified in our name.

Salvation begins with conversion to Christ, but it does not end there. The transformation of an individual leads to a transformation of relationships, of families, of communities, of nations. We long for and anticipate with joy the new creation of all things in Christ.

Our mission is God's mission. God in love reaches out through his people to a suffering and needy world, a world that he loves. In mission we express in word and deed and through the totality of our lives the compassion of God for the lost.

Our identification with God in this outward movement of love for the world requires a corresponding inward movement from ourselves towards God. Christ says 'come to me' before he says 'go into the world'. These two movements are in relation to each other like breathing in and breathing out. To engage in one movement to the exclusion of the other is the way of death. To engage in both is the way of life.

The vitality of our spiritual life as a movement will be seen and tested in our turning to the world in evangelism and service, but the springs of our spiritual life are to be found in our turning to God in worship, in the disciplines of life in the Spirit, and in the study of God's word.