

SALVATION STORY STUDY GUIDE

CHAPTER ONE

Word of the living God

The source of Christian doctrine

Related Doctrine

We believe that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were given by inspiration of God, and that they only constitute the Divine rule of Christian faith and practice.

N.B. – Before commencing on the following study guide for chapter one of *Salvation Story*, read the chapter in the Handbook in its entirety, including each of the Scripture references.

BELIEF

1. *Historical summary*

Our Old and New Testaments were combined to form the 'Canon', which is the English equivalent of the Greek *kanon* and Hebrew *kaneh* (reed). As a reed was sometimes used as a measuring rod, the word came to be used in that sense, and was eventually extended to refer to all kinds of rulers or means of measurement, even to rules, standards or models. The word was probably first used to refer to the authoritative body of Scripture by the theologian Origen of Alexandria in the 3rd century AD. This use of the word became established a century later. The Scriptures were the 'ruler' by which faith and practice were to be measured.

During the first three centuries of the Church's existence, there was, of course, no New Testament Canon, no specifically Christian body of writings that together were universally considered to have divine authority equal to that of the Old Testament Canon. The Old Testament was the Bible of the early Church. Over time, however, writings with apostolic signature (letters, gospels, and an apocalyptic book) became widely circulated, proved reliable as spiritual guides, and gained consensus as authoritative. After wide circulation they were collected, and eventually canonized.

As the first Christians were mostly Jews and as the early Church sprang from Judaism, the *Old Testament Canon* was naturally accepted as authoritative. Furthermore, Christians understood the Old Testament as pointing to Christ as the fulfilment of the intention of its law and the realisation of its hope. Within Judaism itself, the Canon, fixed at the Council of Jamnia in 91 AD, came to be seen within the threefold division of the Law, the Prophets and the Writings. The Law (*torah* in Hebrew) was the first five books (commonly called by Jews 'the five-fifths of the Law'), which contained both the early history of the Jewish people and the laws by which their lives were to be governed. Christian scholars such as Tertullian and Origen adopted the name *Pentateuch* (literally, 'five books') as a convenient title for the books. The Prophets were the writings of men who spoke for God both to individuals and to the nation as a whole, spoke words of insight, judgment, and restoration. Their words also spoke of a future redemption both for the Jews and for the nations, words which Christians are convinced point to Christ.

The Writings consisted of a wide range of sacred literature which included poetry, history, wisdom and apocalyptic works.

During the time separating the Old and New Testament periods, commonly referred to as the intertestamental period, a number of sacred writings were penned by Jews. Those that were more commonly used came to be known

as the *Apocrypha* (of Greek derivation, signifying books that are 'hidden away'). The name suggests that these 14 books – sometimes 15 are identified – were seen as containing mysterious or difficult teachings which were hard for the simple to understand. Many considered them to have limited value spiritually and not to warrant canonical status, even to be heretical in places.

The Apocrypha appears in some versions of the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, known as the *Septuagint* (or 'Version of the Seventy', after the seventy scholars who, as the legend goes, all arrived at the same translation independently). The Septuagint was the translation used by the early Church. When Jerome made his Latin translation of the Old and New Testaments in the 4th century, he prefaced each of the Apocryphal books with words of caution regarding their canonicity. Subsequent copiers, however, often omitted the prefaces, and the Apocrypha commonly appeared as part of the Canon. From time to time theologians in the West pointed out the unique authority of the Hebrew Canon, excluding the Apocrypha, and in the 16th century the Protestant Reformers steadfastly denied that the Apocrypha belonged in the Canon. All branches of the Protestant Church have subsequently rejected the canonicity of the Apocrypha. In 1546 at the Council of Trent, however, the Roman Catholic Church set its seal of approval on 11 of the books of the Apocrypha as authentically canonical. Some editions of Protestant Bibles still contain the Apocrypha, but they are usually set apart from the books of the Canon.

The discovery of the *Dead Sea Scrolls* in 1947 has provided both helpful confirmation of the Old Testament texts and a wealth of materials for further refinement. These scrolls contain all or parts of all the books of the Old Testament except Esther, some in several copies. They are a thousand years and more older than the oldest Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament previously known. They carry us back to a time before the text had become standardised. Usually, there is little difference either from the traditional (Masoretic) text or from the Septuagint. Also, there are readings of some texts not found in any other form, and occasionally those readings are judged by scholars to be closer to the original than the traditional text. Hence, the Dead Sea Scrolls have proven to be a valuable confirmation, as well as a refining corrective, to the traditional Hebrew Old Testament text.

The *New Testament Canon* consists of the Gospels, the Acts, the Letters, and the Revelation. The Gospels were originally prepared to meet the need of a particular church, church group, or larger group of people, for written records of the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. The Letters were written by leaders in the Church to counsel the young churches and their leaders on matters of faith and practice usually arising out of the environment in which they found themselves, the problems which their witness created for them, or the challenges which their mission brought. Because of their great spiritual value, some of these Gospels and Letters were circulated widely and collected into groups of writings. Other writings were also circulated on a smaller scale but did not prove to be universally acceptable. The manuscripts were copied and passed down within communities and from community to community. None of the originals survive, only copies. However, large numbers of manuscripts date from as early as 350 AD, or about 300 years after the originals. This is quite amazing compared to the much later dates of the great majority of other kinds of manuscripts. For example, the earliest copy we have of Herodotus' work dates from 900 AD, 1,300 years after the original writing; the earliest copy of Tacitus' work from 1100 AD, 1,000 years after the original writing.

The need to begin identifying those writings that were reliable, and distinguishing them from those that had questionable value, became clear after the heretic Marcion, around 140 AD, issued a canon of Scripture consisting of mutilated versions of Luke's Gospel and 10 Letters of Paul. This 'heretical canon' further stimulated concern about the identification of writings that were reliable guides for faith and practice. Various other canons began to appear, until Eusebius, the Church historian of the early 4th century, classified all the circulated writings into three groups: the universally acknowledged, the disputed, and the spurious and heretical.

The conditions for canonicity were threefold:

- a) the writing had to conform to the rule of faith (or creed) handed down in the Church;
- b) it had to have apostolic origin (be written by or contain the teaching of the earliest apostles);
- c) it had to be in general use in the churches.

Subsequent Church Councils confirmed the selection of the New Testament Canon by these criteria. Many writings were rejected as unauthentic – for example, the Gospel of Thomas, which contained some rather fantastic and dubious miracles attributed to the child Jesus. The earliest New Testament canon we know of is the Muratorian Canon, a Latin translation of a Greek original, usually dated around 170-190 AD. Although incomplete, the list contains the four Gospels, the Acts and seventeen of the Letters. The Canon of Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem (340 AD), and that of the Council of Laodicaea (363 AD), list 26 of the 27 books, with only Revelation missing.

The earliest known appearances of the 27-book New Testament Canon are:

- a) the Festal Letter of Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria (367 AD);
- b) the decisions of the Roman Synod (393 AD); and
- c) the decisions of the Council of Hippo (393 AD) and the Third Council of Carthage (397 AD), both of which were greatly influenced by Augustine, Bishop of Hippo.

Subsequent challenges to the canonicity of the 27 books were very minimal.

For centuries the Latin version of the Bible was authoritative in the western Church. As the great majority of people did not read Latin, the Scriptures were accessible only through the interpretation of priests and scholars, as well as through artistic and dramatic presentations of Bible teachings, stories and characters. It was not until the time of the Pre-reformers and the Reformers (14th and 15th centuries) that translations in the common vernacular began to appear. During the latter half of the 20th Century, translations have proliferated to the point of confusion. While we should be grateful for such accessibility, we should also learn to distinguish between translations that seek to be very accurate interpretations of the original Greek or Hebrew texts, and paraphrases that take more liberty with the text in order to engage the reader. Both have great value, but we should be fully aware of what the translator or paraphraser is trying to do.

2. The importance of the doctrine to Christian faith

a) Revelation

As Christianity is *a religion of revelation*, the question as to whether or not God actually does reveal himself to us is an important one. Is divine revelation possible? Can God actually speak to us, and if he can, has he?

We believe that he has, and because of our claim, we place ourselves opposite those who believe either in no God or in a God with whom there can be no communication or relationship. Those who believe that we shape our own destiny must logically believe that, if there is a God, he is not active in history to bring it to the full realisation of his purposes, and that it is futile to seek some word from God with regard to our life-journey. If God has not revealed himself, has not told us why he created us, what he is inviting us to become, and where he is leading us, then we are indeed on our own. Without revelation, we are left to find our own way.

Those who want to determine if we can know the mind and heart of God ask: Has God spoken to us in this book which Christians claim is his reliable word? Does this book accurately convey how he has revealed himself in the history of Israel, the life of Jesus, and the history of the early Church, as well as to the writers? We answer: Yes. If such revelation is a fantasy, then so is our claim that the Scriptures are the word of God. But if it is reality, then the Scriptures are, indeed, God's true story with us – and they hold the key to life.

b) Inspiration

The doctrine is also important because it defines the bases of the reliability of the divine revelation in Scripture. When we say that the Bible is *inspired*, we are saying far more than that it is inspirational. We are saying that it is 'God-breathed' and therefore fully reliable and definitive. (Inspiration literally means 'in-breathing'.) We are saying that the writers were so inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit that they faithfully conveyed the truth and action of God: they told the true salvation story. We are saying that the Scriptures possess a quality which causes us to recognise them as uniquely authoritative and enables us to treat them as a means of grace. This quality reinforces their claim to be God's word of salvation to us, and it is the testimony of one generation after another that through the Scriptures God finds us and we find God.

...they (the books of the Bible) did not become Scripture by the decision of any church or man. They became Scripture because out of them readers in their sorrow found comfort, in their despair, hope, in their weakness, strength, in their temptations, power, in their darkness, light, in their uncertainty, faith, and in their sin, a Saviour. (William Barclay)

c) Authority

The inspiration of Scripture is the basis for the claim of the Bible's *authority*. All faiths have some source, or sources, that for them are authoritative. For the Christian, it is the Bible that speaks with authority. The Bible

is unique and sufficient for guidance in matters of faith and practice. It is *unique* because it reveals thoughts and actions of God that we would never be able to know about otherwise or on our own. The message of the Bible is often surprising, revolutionary, unsettling – and suffused with a grace quite outside human bounds. Scripture is also *sufficient*: it stands alone, above all other authorities, serving as the ‘ruler’ by which their validity is always to be tested. In the words of Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria (4th century AD): ‘The holy and divinely inspired Scriptures are of themselves sufficient to the enunciation of truth.’ (*Contra Gentes*, I) And Augustine of Hippo (5th century AD): ‘In those things which are plainly laid down in Scripture, all things are found which embrace faith and morals’ (*On Christian Doctrine*, ii).

It is the Bible that shows the way to life and that points to him who *is* ‘the way, the truth and the life’. The study of Christian doctrine assumes the authority of this Book. This assumption is justified by the testimony of the Christian Church through 20 centuries. It is validated by the experience of countless believers of many races and cultures who have proved the truth of its salvation and of its teaching in their lives. With minds and hearts quickened by the Holy Spirit, they perceive and receive the divine word spoken to them within its pages.

d) Confirmation

The Holy Spirit not only inspired the Scriptures, he also confirms its witness. As we read the Bible, it comes alive as the Spirit ‘breathes upon the word, and brings the truth to sight’ (SASB 657), and more especially as we find the Lord himself ‘beyond the sacred page’ (SASB 650). Many read the Scriptures without seeing, without understanding. This is especially so because God’s thoughts are not our thoughts and his ways are not ours. If the person reading the Bible is not open to thoughts and ways that are not his own, he will not know what he is reading. But if he puts on ‘the spectacles of the Holy Spirit’, as one theologian put it, he will see God at work. The witness will be confirmed.

Alongside the Spirit’s direct confirmation of the message there are other confirmations. First, there is the *internal verification* whereby Scripture illumines itself, one passage confirming and enlightening another, and the remarkable unity of the whole unfolds. Second, there is the *experiential verification* whereby persons find the truth about themselves in Scripture, come face to face with God, and are changed. Third, there is the *social verification* whereby Scripture has played a positive and decisive guiding role in the course of human events and in the lives of countless communities.

3. Issues for Salvationists

a) Knowledge of Scripture

It is extremely important that Salvationists be biblically literate. To say that the Scriptures are our ‘divine rule of Christian faith and practice’ and not to immerse ourselves in them and grapple with their message as a continuing discipline is to put the lie to our doctrinal claim. If we are not reading it regularly and coming to terms with the God who speaks through its pages, we cannot assume that we are living in obedience to the word of God. A corps that takes knowledge of the Scriptures seriously is a corps better positioned to discern God’s leading.

b) Recovery of Scriptural authority

The recovery of Scriptural authority does not come about by taking a rigid, legalistic approach to Scripture and utilizing the Bible as an unbending book of law controlling Christian faith and practice. To be sure, the Bible has its absolutes – certain doctrinal truths and instructions which are not negotiable. But its true authority lies in the true and living God whom we encounter when we approach it in expectant faith and the Holy Spirit illumines our minds. It lies in God’s story told in the inspired words. It lies in that story becoming our story because we allow it to grip us and transform our own storyline. The people who really take the authority of Scripture seriously are those who allow themselves to be drawn into its story where they meet God face to face.

If we are to recover Scriptural authority, it can only happen in this way. The dead letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. When we have met God and entered God’s story in the pages of the Bible, we have experienced the One who has all authority and heard the story that defines our destiny. Obedience to the word of God is first of all obedience to the living Word, Jesus Christ.

c) Other authorities

As early as the 1st century, the Church – sometimes congregations within the Church – developed creeds or credal statements that summarised basic Christian beliefs as revealed in Scripture. Carrying a certain authority, these were seen as helpful guides for Christian belief. (*Salvation Story*, appendix 11.) Also, certain movements and communities within the Church developed guidelines and rules for their living, but again these were subservient to Scriptural teaching on Christian practice. As time progressed, the Church hierarchy became increasingly powerful, especially since the political power and structure of the Roman Empire were crumbling. For centuries many believed that the authority of this ecclesiastical empire, concentrated in the Pope, its head, and preserved in the edicts of the Church, was fully binding. The Protestant Reformation of the 16th century refuted this claim and reaffirmed the authority of Scripture as primary, a claim which recent statements of the Roman Catholic Church also affirm.

Salvationists affirm the basic truth and value of the classic Christian creeds without giving them the authority of Scripture. They see their own Eleven Articles in the same way: as helpful but not perfect. They also recognise the value of certain additional teachings of the Church over the centuries, including many of the suggested disciplines and patterns for Christian living. But these are not seen as carrying any authority on a level with biblical teaching.

It is worth considering how the erosion of authority in the modern and post-modern worlds affects the appeal of a Christian faith that relies on the authority of Scripture. On the one hand, the loss of authority in the world and in people's lives may create a hunger for authority and a susceptibility to various forms of repressive and even dehumanising authority. On the other, it may create real difficulty in communicating with those who are convinced that there is no valid authority outside themselves and few controls outside their own individualistic drives. There is also the view that all viewpoints are equally valid, or that those who hold any view have full right to claim the equal validity of that view. In today's world, any claim to Scriptural authority will not be foisted on people; it will only be proven by the authenticity and attractiveness of those who take that claim seriously.

4. The essentials of the doctrine

a) A God who speaks

Our first article of faith is based on the assumption that God communicates with us. This means, first, that he is involved in our lives and in our history. What unifies all of Scripture is that throughout it we are dealing with a living God who enters our lives and speaks to us through his actions and his words. The Bible does not so much present us with concepts of God as with a record of God's action: God making his claims, keeping his promises, pursuing us, saving us through his grace. It reveals a God who is ever-present and inescapable (see *Psalms 139*), as well as one who speaks clearly at decisive or critical times in our lives, whether directly or through prophets. Without God speaking, doctrine is no more than us speaking our own thoughts.

b) Revelation with primary authority

Scripture not only reveals a God who speaks, it claims to carry his words. It claims to be the word of God. If this is not true, Christianity cannot be a religion of revelation, or Christians cannot know exactly what the revelation from God is. As the word of God, Scripture has primary authority. Its authority supersedes all others.

c) A book inspired

Essential to this claim of Scriptural authority is the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture. If the Scriptures have not, in some unique way, been inspired by God the Holy Spirit, they cannot claim to carry primary authority; they are only one among other sources of truth. The doctrine of inspiration is the necessary foundation for our belief that the Scriptures simply must be heard and heeded and that they point the way to salvation. The Bible tells *the* salvation story upon which our own salvation story rests confidently.

d) Christ the key

Essential to our understanding of the message of Scripture is our belief that Christ is the key to unlocking the meaning. We make this claim for the Old Testament as well as the New. For example, we understand

Isaiah 53 as a prophecy that points to Christ, who gives it its full meaning. Spirit-led Philip encounters the eunuch reading *Isaiah* and explains to him that Christ is the messianic saviour to whom *Isaiah* was referring (*Acts 8:30-35*). Other parts of the New Testament identify Old Testament passages as pointing to Christ. (For example, *Hebrews 5:5-6; 10:5-7*.) Christ is, in fact, the final meaning of all the saving words of the Bible – words like grace, peace, love, mercy, wisdom, righteousness: he is the one in whom they all become real. He is the Word of God.

5. Discussion questions/exercises

- a) Describe the doctrine of inspiration in a way that is most meaningful and helpful to you.
- b) In keeping Scripture as our primary authority, how can we avoid ‘bibliolatry’, or making an idol out of the Bible?
- c) Discuss the various ways God may reveal himself and how these ways relate to his revelation in Scripture.
- d) Discuss the ways in which the Old Testament points to the New, as well as how the New Testament is incomplete without the Old.
- e) There are many ways in which the Scriptures can be distorted or wrongly interpreted. Here are some possible examples of *distortion* to be discussed:
 - i. Judas’ betrayal of Jesus was the result of a kind of involuntary Satanic possession. Compare *Luke 22:3-4* and *John 6:70-71; 13:2* with *Mark 7:17-12* (*Matthew 15:3-4; Luke 6:43-45*). How does Scripture correct the distortion of Scripture in this case?
 - ii. Our salvation is the outcome of both our faith in Christ and our good works. Compare *James 2:14-26* with *Ephesians 2:8-10, Galatians 3:1-5, Romans 6*. How is the distortion corrected in this case?

Also, indicate what can be done to avoid tendencies to misinterpretation.

- f) Discuss an experience in your own life when Scripture gave the needed direction and insight, or spoke in a way that was extremely helpful or decisive for your own life at the time.
- g) One example of how Scripture interprets itself is using *Romans, chapter 6* to shed light on *Ephesians 2:8-10*. Another would be Philip using *Isaiah 53:7-8* to explain the good news of Jesus to the eunuch (*Acts 8:26-35*). Find another example of Scripture interpreting itself, or Scripture interpreting Scripture and explain the self-interpretation in this instance.
- h) Let us define ‘translations’ as versions attempting to be as literal as possible in matching the words and phrases of the original language. Similarly let us define ‘paraphrases’ as attempting to convey the meaning of the original but using the style of the language into which the text is being translated as well as the updated expressions of that language.
 - i. Discuss Bible translations and paraphrases. List those versions of the Bible that you would consider to be more a literal translation, and those that you would consider to be more a paraphrase. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each.
 - ii. Also discuss whether a less literal translation of a sentence might actually provide a better translation (convey the original meaning better) than a more literal translation, because it provides a ‘dynamic equivalent’ in the idiom or natural expression of the language into which the sentence is being translated.
- i) Think through and discuss how your corps can help its members to encounter Scripture on an ongoing basis and can provide the teaching and resources to equip them to do so.

6. Further discussion

a) The New Testament texts

The New Testament consists of copies of letters, Gospels, and a history that were written to individuals, churches, or groups of churches during the first century AD. The letters were written to convey the truth of the gospel, to build and strengthen the fellowship of believers, to combat heresy, to address specific

problems in the Church, and to teach the way of discipleship. The Gospels were written to proclaim Jesus as the Christ through the presentation of his life and ministry. The history (The Acts of the Apostles) was written to show how the Holy Spirit (the Spirit of Jesus) created, empowered, and led the early Church in its life and mission.

Because of their proven spiritual value, these documents were copied and shared with other churches. As these copies multiplied, differences in the manuscripts began to appear. Most of the differences can be attributed to unintended accidents – for example, mis-copying a letter or a word. Others can be attributed to attempts to improve the grammar or style of the original or the copy, or to make a sentence more understandable. Hence, in the years following the composition of the original letters, history, or Gospels, hundreds of *variant readings* came into existence.

Additional variant readings occurred when the New Testament documents were translated into other languages as the Church moved into other cultures during the 2nd and 3rd centuries. These include: Syriac, Latin, and several dialects of Coptic (used in Egypt). Beginning with the 4th century, copies in other languages came into being: Armenian, Georgian, Ethiopic, Arabic, and Nubian in the East, and Gothic and Anglo-Saxon in the West. These varied considerably in the amount of care that was taken to maintain accuracy.

Another interesting phenomenon during the early centuries of the Church was the development of so-called *local texts*, or texts which became peculiar to particular localities. Whereas some of these underwent some further change through the influence of other texts from the outside, for the most part they retained their special character. Today, they are classified under groupings usually referred to by the following designations: Alexandrian (generally considered to be the best text and most faithful to the original), Western (traceable to the 2nd century), Caesarean (probably an Eastern text dating from the 3rd century), and Byzantine (known also as Syrian, Antiochean, Koine, or Ecclesiastical; a more refined text that sought to ‘improve’ the language; generally regarded as the authoritative text from the 7th until the 15th century, when the printing press was invented).

The Byzantine text provided the basis for almost all translations of the New Testament into modern languages until the 19th century. By this time biblical scholarship had advanced considerably, and new copies of manuscripts were being discovered and compared with others. ‘During the 20th century, with the discovery of several New Testament manuscripts much older than any that had hitherto been available, it has become possible to produce editions of the New Testament that approximate ever more closely to what is regarded as the wording of the original documents’ (Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, London, New York: United Bible Societies, 1971, p. xxiv).

The process of determining the most reliable or accurate readings of a text has become a very precise science with proven criteria. Here are some of them:

- i. Earlier manuscripts tend to be more reliable.
- ii. The geographical locale of particular manuscripts may suggest certain ‘slants’ or peculiarities. But where readings from very different areas agree, that reading tends to be accurate.
- iii. Manuscripts that have been proven to be more trustworthy carry greater weight where texts divert.
- iv. Generally, more difficult readings are to be preferred because of the tendency of later copyists to ‘improve’ the rendering.
- v. Generally, shorter readings are to be preferred, as later copyists have a tendency to elaborate rather than shorten.
- vi. Where one reading seems to clash with another passage, and another is more in accord with it, the former is usually to be preferred as the second is probably the result of an attempt to harmonize.
- vii. The peculiar style, intention, and audience of the writer influences the choice of words and forms of expression.

b) Interpretation of Scripture (hermeneutics)

As Salvationists, we believe in the authority and primacy of Scripture in matters of faith and practice. This fact underlines the importance of understanding, as best we can, the actual meaning of the biblical texts. If

we are careless or manipulative in interpreting Scripture, then we are not really hearing what Scripture has to say, but rather, dulling our ears or making the text say what we want it to say.

It is therefore important that we learn to be as faithful as possible to the original meaning of the text we are studying – in short, that we learn to *interpret* well. The science or discipline of scriptural interpretation is called *hermeneutics*. (Hermes was the messenger of the gods in Greek mythology. Hermeneutics, therefore, is the bringing of the message to the listener.) Hermeneutics is the broad discipline or practice of scriptural interpretation. *Exegesis* (literally, the act of showing the way, or leading out) is the process of interpreting a specific passage, or applying hermeneutical principles in interpreting that passage. Hermeneutics is important in scriptural interpretation not only because the original language must be translated into our language, but also:

- i. because the cultures, ways of thinking, and assumptions of the biblical world are so different from our own and need to be understood if the texts are to be fully understood;
- ii. because the Bible is comprised of different kinds of literature, each of which requires different methods of interpretation;
- iii. and because each text must be interpreted in light of other texts and in the context of the overall witness of Scripture.

The more one is familiar with the language, the world, and the message of the Bible, the less conscious the hermeneutics (the practice of biblical interpretation) needs to be. It is something like a husband and wife who have lived together for a very long time and know each other intimately. They understand each other with greater ease and do not have to work so hard and so self-consciously at sending and receiving messages between each other: a sentence, or even a word, will do where before more explanation was needed. But at first, they had to work harder to achieve understanding. The more one works at understanding Scripture, with mind open and available tools applied, the more one does it with greater ease and quicker insight. The one caveat, of course, is that no matter how familiar we are with the Bible and skilled in hermeneutics, its message often still comes as a great surprise – after all it is the word of *God* and therefore transcends rational explanation.

There are a number of *hermeneutical principles* to be utilised in the interpretation of Scripture. Some of them are principles which are used in the interpretation of writings in general; others are principles specific to the interpretation of Scripture.

Here are some examples of *general hermeneutical principles*.

i. Type of literature (literary genre)

One must understand the kind of literature being dealt with in order to know how best to interpret it. How one interprets poetry, for example, is not the same as how one interprets a historical work. Poetry deals in figurative language, whereas history is more concerned with the accurate representation and interpretation of events. Poetry is also governed by certain rules and devices. The poetry of the Psalms, for example, often uses Hebrew parallelism whereby successive lines enhance the meaning by expressing the same idea in a different way:

I call with all my heart; answer me, O Lord,
And I will obey your decrees.
I call out to you; save me
And I will keep your statutes.
I rise before dawn and cry for help;
I have put my hope in your word (*Psalms 119:145-147*).

ii. The etymology of words (their origin, development, and present meaning)

When we interpret a Scripture passage, we must look at the words. Not only must we understand the words of our own language that are used (the words of the translation in our own language that we are using) in the passage, we must also use Bible dictionaries and commentaries to get help in understanding the meaning of the words in the original Old Testament Hebrew and New Testament Greek. There are a number of ways we can study the words. One way is to study the *history* of the particular word. It is helpful

to know, for example, that in the Old Testament the Hebrew word used for 'Spirit' (*ruach*) originally meant wind or breath. This etymology helps us to understand some important characteristics of the Spirit of God (the Holy Spirit), such as his unseen power, his freedom and unpredictability, etc.

Another is to *compare* the use of the word in other places in the Bible to see if those usages shed light on the meaning of the word in the text being considered. Another is to consider all the *possible meanings* of the word and then to decide which meaning best fits the context of the text. And finally, one can compare the word with *synonyms* or other related words, which may enrich the understanding of the word in question.

iii. Grammar

Grammatical interpretation primarily means understanding the meaning of sentences and paragraphs by applying the rules of grammar and honouring the integrity of the grammatical construction. To take a very minor part of the construction of a sentence and exaggerate its importance in interpreting the verse or the section is to give an unbalanced exegesis, to diminish the value of the main point, and possibly to distort the meaning of the passage. For example, some have made much of the 'bitter root' or 'root of bitterness' of *Hebrews 12:15*. This conjecture is not only speculative, it does violence to the grammar of the sentence, as well as the paragraph, which uses the phrase in passing and makes little of it.

Here are some of the *hermeneutical principles that are special to Scripture*

i. A spiritual message

As the Bible is a book with a spiritual message, it must be interpreted accordingly. If we were to approach it only as literature, history, biography, and poetry (all of which are contained therein), we would not be accepting Scripture on its own terms. The Bible is the story of salvation, and it is written to bring the reader into the story and a saving way of life. What this means finally is that, after all the hermeneutical methods have been applied, we can discern the essential meaning only through the eyes of faith, only by placing ourselves within the text and believing the God whom we meet there. The text is written as a claim on the listener. It is a message for the soul.

We must be clear, however, that the essentially spiritual nature of the Bible does not give license for the interpreter to 'spiritualise' texts. The 'spiritualiser' is given to finding a hidden spiritual meaning behind almost everything in Scripture. Good hermeneutics recognises that spiritualising is legitimate where it is clearly indicated or called for by the text itself, but it does not allow for its indiscriminate use as an easy way to interpret a difficult text. (An example of uncalled-for spiritualising would be to interpret the prophet's loss of an axehead in the Jordan River, and Elisha's recovery of it, in *2 Kings 6:1-7*, as a story about our need to recover the lost Spirit of God.) This kind of spiritualising sometimes takes the form of 'allegorising', where the interpreter attempts to place a spiritual meaning on every part or character in the story. This is sometimes done with parables of Jesus, which usually do not lend themselves to this kind of interpretation as the stories tend to have one central point. However, allegorizing is a legitimate hermeneutical method when the text itself makes clear that it is to be understood allegorically. (See *Matthew 13:1-8, 18-23*.) All forms of spiritualising the text, when used for no reason suggested by the text, are prone to private or forced interpretations, and they are often engaged in by those who are unwilling to work hard to find the well-deserved reward of the hermeneutical enterprise.

ii. Scriptural unity

As diverse in style, cultural context, and authorship as are the Scriptures, Christian hermeneutics approaches its task with the conviction that the Bible has an underlying unity of purpose and message. What this means with respect to any given text is that, first, it needs to be interpreted within the context of the whole witness of Scripture, and, second, it cannot be interpreted in a way that contradicts the basic message of the Bible. It is certainly true that some texts are difficult to harmonise with each other, but even the resulting dissonance usually represents contrasting aspects of the same truth or opposites that must be honoured. For example, we could see considerable contrast between various Scripture passages relating to eschatology, but what is helpful is to glean the basic truths which they all affirm, or of which each reveals a contrasting facet. Another example would be the different ways 'law' is used in Scripture: some passages use the term to mark a condition of repression from which we need to be redeemed (*Galatians 3; 4*); others to mark important requirements for Christians to fulfill by living according to the Spirit (*Romans 8:1-4*). These

contrasting usages of the term 'law' are not contradictory; they indicate very different relationships to law based on a person's state of grace. Both give important aspects of the salvation story. Scripture must be approached as a whole: 'The sum of your word is truth....' (*Psalms 119:160*).

iii. The progression of revelation

In revealing himself to humankind, God makes himself understandable to the particular person or group. (Otherwise, he has not actually 'revealed' himself.) This means, of course, that he honours the limitations and ways of understanding of those to whom he is revealing himself. He accommodates himself to their understanding.

This is the premise of progressive revelation. On the basis of this premise, we can understand, for example, why God appears in a more straightforward way to a more primitive culture and in a more visual way to a more visually oriented culture. The premise also suggests that over a period of time, as God interacts more and more with his people, his will and purpose are brought into sharper focus and earlier gaps in understanding are filled in.

Progressive revelation has two important implications for hermeneutics. The first is that where there is a strong difference, the older revelation must usually give way to the newer. For example, some Old Testament concepts give way to new concepts in the New Testament. The second is that everything in Scripture is not of equal importance and value. Both of these implications must be reflected in interpretation.

iv. Scripture interpreting itself

The best commentary on Scripture is Scripture itself. No part of Scripture is intended to be understood on its own; it must be seen as part of the whole. To elevate one particular text as an absolute without reference to the whole context of Scripture is to open oneself to distortion, and even heresy.

v. The supernatural

The interpreter must come to terms with numerous manifestations of the supernatural in Scripture. With the rapid progress of science over the last 200 years and its tendency to explain all happenings by natural causation, explanations of events or experiences as supernatural have been rejected by many people. Scriptures have been 'reworked' in order to provide scientific explanations for what were recorded as supernatural events. In more recent years the scientific method of finding natural explanations for everything has itself come under serious question. Many are becoming more open to the possibility of supernatural experience.

The supernatural is there in Scripture, and however we want to explain it or fit it into our understanding of the world, it cannot be extracted without doing irreparable damage to the text. The Scriptures will not give up their stubborn insistence that the Creator of all things (including all natural processes) will not stop intervening within the course of human history and interacting with our lives. The supernatural will not go away. In fact, this is one of the enduring themes of Scriptures themselves.

vi. The conditional

A very important principle of hermeneutics is the recognition that some teachings of Scripture are so shaped by historical/social/cultural context, so focussed on specific situations of that time and place, that the underlying message or process must be understood or affirmed, rather than the external form of the teaching itself. Revelation is contextual; the word of God is spoken in and to a particular situation. It has both eternal validity and concrete expression. Thus, when interpreting a particular passage directed toward a situation that no longer exists, or that exists in a very different form or equivalent expression, interpretation must focus on the enduring truth that is not conditioned by one particular set of circumstances, or even on the process by which the word of God encounters certain kinds of circumstances and works redemptively in them.

One very clear example of this would be the apostle Paul's instructions admonishing women to keep silent in the churches (*1 Corinthians 14:34-36*). This clearly had to do with a specific historical/social/cultural context where women speaking in public places would have been seen as highly offensive and would have

caused considerable disruption. (Note the concern with 'order' in *verse 36*.) The principle is clearly for Christians not to cause undue offence to the social order (where abuse of persons is not at stake), and the process is suitable adaptation of the gospel to culture, in order eventually to transform it.

Catherine Booth applied this hermeneutical principle to the same passage when she wrote:

...a mistaken and unjustifiable application of the passage...[has] resulted in more loss to the Church, evil to the world, and dishonour to God, than any of the errors we have already referred to.



LIFE

1. *Lifestyle and ethics*

- a) How far should we carry the command to obey Scripture? What does it actually mean to have our thinking and our living 'captive to the word of God' (to use Martin Luther's phrase)?
- b) Discuss some ethical teachings of Scripture that have authority and clarity and that speak directly with relevance today. (*Matthew 5:21-24, 27-28, 38-42, 43-47*.)
- c) Discuss some contemporary ethical issues which did not exist in biblical times in the same form, or at all. Indicate how other ethical teachings or general principles from the Bible can be called upon to provide needed guidance on decision making in these matters.
- d) How do you deal with those passages in the Bible, particularly the Old Testament, which seem to reveal a God who can dispense harsh punishment, not only for the guilty, but also for their innocent family members? For example the destruction of human beings, save Noah and his family, through the great flood (*Genesis 7:23*); the death of the firstborn of Egypt (*Exodus 12*).
- e) Case studies:
 - i. A young person in the corps comes to you disturbed by something she is being taught in her psychology class. She tells you that the teacher says that the concept of sin found in the Bible is a human invention the purpose of which is to create guilt and maintain tight religious control, and that it reflects a pre-scientific world view and is outmoded today. What do you say to her? How would you show her that the biblical understanding of sin provides a helpful perspective and analysis of the human condition? How would you help her to use the Bible to show its relevance to the plight of a confused, degraded and abusive world?

Specifically, to what scriptural texts would you refer, and how would you interpret them to show their relevance to the human condition? For example, could you show how the story of Cain and Abel (*Genesis 4*) reveals real insight into both the psychological and the spiritual dynamics of a human race driven by its own fallenness? Or, could you show her the Bible's wisdom by referring her to the covenantal-relational understanding of sin in the Bible, as in *Psalms 51:4* where sin is seen as a breach in our relationship with God, or as in *1 John 2:9-11; 4:11-12, 20-21* where sin is seen as a failure to love one another?

- ii. Someone has been visiting your corps recently. You have started a special group studying The Salvation Army and its beliefs. You have just given a presentation on the first article and are taking questions and comments. This person says that whereas he finds much in the Bible that is certainly true and helpful, there are also some parts of it that are morally reprehensible. Furthermore, he says, he has found much help in certain Hindu writings. How do you respond?

2. *The Mission of the Church*

- a) How does seeing ourselves as 'a people of the Book' strengthen our calling to mission? What is there about the Bible and its message that helps the people of God to understand themselves as a people called to mission?

- b) Discuss the Bible as a tool for mission. How can we effectively use the Bible to introduce people to Jesus
 - i. in our evangelism?
 - ii. in our social service ministry?
 - iii. in our social action on behalf of the marginalised or disadvantaged?

3. *Personal ministry*

- a) Discuss the role of the Bible in your own personal ministry. How does the Bible help you to define and understand your own ministry with respect, particularly to:
 - i. what it reveals about God's purpose for the world and for his Church?
 - ii. what your own gifting is?
 - iii. how you can exercise your ministry gifts in ethical ways?
- b) What are some of the ways you find the Bible helpful and authoritative in your own faith journey?
- c) Discuss the various resources for Bible study that are available. For example:
 - i. Bible dictionaries
 - ii. Bible concordances
 - iii. Bible commentaries.

WORSHIP

1. Design a worship service that builds on the following progression:
 - a) The Word Revealed (*Salvation Story* pages 4-5)
 - b) The Word Inspired (*Salvation Story* pages 5-6)
 - c) The Word Eternal (*Salvation Story* pages 6-7)
2. Develop an affirmation of faith that incorporates both faith in Jesus as the living Word and the authority of Scripture as the written word.
3. Use songs, poetry, music, drama, etc. that speak of:
 - a) A God who reveals himself (Songs SASB 449 O Love, revealed on earth in Christ; 730 I know not why God's wondrous grace)
 - b) The word inspired (SASB section 'The Scriptures')
 - c) The word eternal (SASB section 'The Scriptures')
4. Utilise Scripture chosen from these sections of the Handbook for readings and preaching.
5. Decide how you wish the worshippers to respond, or what you want them to respond to. The congregation, of course, will hear the word of God in the meeting. How can you help them also to *see* it? How can you portray the living word in a way that makes it visible?

BIBLE STUDIES

1. *Reflect on questions relating in general to the Scripture passages referenced in the chapter:*

- a) What is the relationship between the three forms of the 'word of God' described in Scripture
 - i. the spoken word (*Jeremiah 36:1-6; Galatians 1:11-12; I Peter 1:10-12*);
 - ii. the written word (*Exodus 32:15-16; Luke. 1:1-4; John 20:30-31; 2 Timothy 3:14-17*);
 - iii. the living Word, Jesus the Christ (*John 1:1-18; Hebrews 1:1-4*)?

- b) Do you agree that the word of God reveals a message and a way of life that do not conform to the patterns of the present world order? (See for example, *Isaiah 55:6-9; John 1:10-13.*) Discuss this and share other helpful passages.

2. Questions centred on specific passages

- a) Read the passages listed at the end of the section entitled 'The primary authority' (*Salvation Story* pages 8-9). What do these passages teach us about the Scriptures superceding all other claims to authority?
- b) There are other 'authorities' in our lives: church (The Salvation Army), government, parents, tradition, reasoning, etc. What happens when the teaching of Scripture clashes with the messages from these other authorities and a person cannot obey both. An example could be, a country where obedience to the governing authority would mean participation in, or acquiescence to, life-destructive government actions. How would you respond if you were a citizen of such a nation? How do you respond if your present government takes an action which violates your Christian conscience? What guidance can you find in *Acts 4*?

3. Sermon titles/ideas

- a) Consider a series on *revelation*:
- i. God the Revealer
 - ii. God the Revealed
 - iii. God the Unrevealed.
- b) Consider a series on *hearing God*:
- i. In the World
 - ii. In Christ
 - iii. In the Bible
 - iv. In our Relationships.

SALVATION STORY STUDY GUIDE

CHAPTER TWO

The God who is never alone

The doctrine of the Trinity

Related Doctrines

We believe there is only one God, who is infinitely perfect, the Creator, Preserver and Governor of all things, and who is the only proper object of religious worship.

We believe that there are three persons in the Godhead – the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, undivided in essence and co-equal in power and glory.

N.B. – Before commencing on the following study guide for chapter two of *Salvation Story*, read the chapter in the Handbook in its entirety, including each of the Scripture references.

BELIEF

1. Historical summary

The doctrine of the Trinity attempts to answer such enormous questions as ‘What is God really like? How do Father, Son and Holy Spirit relate to one another? If there is only one God, why do we worship Jesus?’ For Christians, the main witness to the doctrine is found in the Bible. But it was in the early centuries of the Christian Church that the biblical revelation was tested in the crucible of Christian experience. From this developing understanding the doctrine of the Trinity emerged. It cannot of course say the last word on the nature of God. But it does provide a benchmark or means by which all who call themselves Christian can be identified.

The Bible is the record of God’s deeds and of what he has chosen to reveal about himself. Although the word Trinity does not appear in its pages at all, the Christian belief is built on firm biblical foundations. The Old Testament speaks of one God, the great creator-redeemer, sustaining a dynamic relationship with his people by his love and saving grace. And yet even the Old Testament’s descriptions of the one God cannot adequately be contained within the confines of a simple monotheism. At times God acts or speaks through his Wisdom or his Word, almost giving them a personal identity (*Proverbs 1:20-33; Psalm 33:6*). There are also hints of the presence of God’s Spirit in personal form (*Psalm 139:7*). Such personifications indicate that within Old Testament monotheism there are hints of trinitarian revelation. They prepare the way for the totally new revelation of God that is to come through Jesus.

Following the Resurrection, the early Christians, who were mainly monotheistic Jews, worshipped Jesus as Lord with no sense that they were being inconsistent or denying their understanding of God as one (*Philippians 2:6-11*). They also accepted the indwelling Spirit as Lord (*2 Corinthians 3:17-18*). An altogether new understanding of the nature of God was beginning to emerge from disciples overwhelmed by the post-Easter revelation.

Writers of the New Testament looked again at their Scriptures and saw new meaning in the Old Testament writings. They identified Jesus Christ with the concepts of Wisdom and Word (*John 1; 1 Corinthians 1:23-24*). They stressed the inter-relatedness of Father, Son and Spirit in the great work of salvation (*2 Corinthians 1:21-22; 13:14; Matthew 28:19; John 14:26; 15:26; 1 Peter 1:2*). Within the one God lay the inter-communication of three co-equal Persons.

Arising out of the biblical witness a process of exploration began during the early centuries of the Christian Church. Christian leaders and thinkers met together in council and through their discussions and debates

eventually arrived at a form of words to describe the new revelation. The Nicene Creed, which comes from the 4th century, is still regarded by Christians of all traditions as a definitive statement of orthodoxy. The creed proclaims the Father, the Son and the Spirit as worthy of worship and carefully describes the relationship between the three Persons. Salvationists subscribe to the truths of the Nicene Creed. (See *Salvation Story* appendix 11, page 124.)

2. *The importance of the doctrine to Christian faith*

The doctrine of the Trinity is vital to the Christian faith because it helps us to recognise and know the God who is never alone. Jews and Muslims, as well as Christians, are monotheists, but only Christians understand God as one in three.

This doctrine helps us to understand what we mean when we say that God is love. True love is about relationship and sharing. We cannot love on our own. The Persons of the Trinity are co-equal and relate to one another in mutual love. They share a common inner life and purpose. In the God who is one in three we see the nature of love.

All that God *does* arises from who he *is*. God, who is love, created the world as a work of his love, not because he needed creation or human beings to complete what was lacking in himself, but because creativity is in the nature of love. It is the God of love who has moved to bring us salvation. The one who is our creator, is our Saviour. We could not receive salvation from any other.

The doctrine of the Trinity also helps us to a better understanding of who *we* are, as human beings. We are created in God's image, individuals made for relationship, to live and share in community. Our families, our Christian communities and the societies in which we live, diverse as they are, can reflect the love of the threefold God and his intentions for us.

3. *Issues for Salvationists*

The doctrine of the Trinity challenges us to recognise the greatness of God, his majesty and perfection, and to explore ways of worshipping him that honour his greatness. In making us aware of the divinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the doctrine teaches us to honour God in his threefold nature: the Father who gives us life and reveals himself to us; the Son who redeems us by his own self-offering; the Holy Spirit who comes alongside us with sustaining grace.

The doctrine describes a God-in-community who reaches out to create community. It is the very basis of the inclusive gospel. From its beginning, The Salvation Army has consistently proclaimed this gospel, calling people of all nations to respond to the love of God. We seek to include and welcome into the family of God those who feel themselves to be excluded from society. In so doing, we have created communities which reflect the inclusiveness, genuine acceptance and mutual love of the triune God. The challenge for us today is to retain that genuine inclusiveness, resisting developments in our corps and centres that may lead people to feel alienated.

4. *Essentials of the doctrine*

a) *Dynamic creation*

The doctrine of the Trinity helps us to understand something of the dynamic creativity of God. Within such a mutual, loving relationship, God is always creating, inter-acting and sharing. There can be nothing static or remote about the triune God.

b) *Three distinct persons*

We rightly refer to God the Father as the first person in the Trinity, because we connect him particularly with creation and the origin of all things, not because he has superiority over the Son and the Holy Spirit. We refer to the Son as the second person in the Trinity because he came 'in the fullness of time' to fulfil the Father's plan of redemption. The Holy Spirit is described as the third person in the Trinity who has been poured out upon humanity in a new way since the first Pentecost. Nevertheless the entire work of creation and redemption comes from the one, true God. The three persons of the Trinity are distinct, yet not divided (*distincti non divisi* – Tertullian).

c) One shared life

The Trinity has sometimes been understood as a hierarchy of persons, with God the Father superior to the Son and the Spirit. It is essential to resist such a picture: there is no superiority or inferiority within the Godhead.

d) One in Three

Over many centuries there have been different ways of describing the Trinity. The way that the doctrine is described is not significant, so long as the oneness and the threeness of God are not compromised.

5. Discussion Questions/Exercises

- a) How do you picture God in your mind when you pray to him? Do you address him in prayer as Father, Son or Spirit? How important do you think this is?
- b) What in this doctrine makes most sense to you? What difference does it make to your way of life?
- c) How would you explain the doctrine of the Trinity to a Jewish or Muslim friend? (This could take the form of a role play.)
- d) How do you create worship:
 - i. that truly honours the triune God and
 - ii. that succeeds in making everyone feel welcomed into his loving community?

6. Further Discussion

a) Early Debates

The early Church Fathers taught and experienced the Christian gospel, which came from Judaism, in their world which was steeped in Greek thought. People in the hellenistic world accepted the existence of one supreme being, but believed that he was pure spirit, remote and unknowable, untouched by direct contact with the world. Consequently, anything material was considered to be inherently evil, so other, lesser deities were thought to have been involved in creating and sustaining the material world. It was not difficult for Greeks to think in terms of a number of spiritual beings controlling the universe, some more divine than others.

When some teachers in the early Church began to think about the Trinity, they used this thinking to suggest a 'graded' Trinity, where the Son was a lesser God than the Father and the Spirit was subordinate to the Son.

Arius was an Egyptian Christian, a priest who took these ideas to a logical and finally untenable conclusion. He taught that Jesus, far from being one with the Father, was the first created being, through whom God then created the world. His bishop, Alexander, strongly disagreed and as a result the Church Council of Nicea was held in 325 AD.

In the debates, Arius was opposed by Athanasius, the young deacon assistant of Bishop Alexander. Athanasius defended the unity of God by using the word *homoousios* (of one substance) to describe the relationship between God the Father and God the Son. This challenged the whole idea of a graded Trinity. Athanasius won the day and the teaching of Arius and his followers was judged as heretical.

The Council of Nicea was the first of three ecumenical councils to deal with this issue. The others took place in 381 at Constantinople and in 451 at Chalcedon. It was at Chalcedon that the wording of the Nicene Creed was finally decided and, with the exception of the *filioque* controversy, (see below) it has remained the same ever since.

b) Further Debates

i. Tertullian

The trinitarian language that we use today has come to us from Latin. As early as the second century, Tertullian used the word *substantia* to describe the unity between the Father, Son and Spirit and the

word *persona* to describe their distinctiveness. *Persona* literally meant the mask worn by an actor indicating the part – or role – he was playing on the stage, so it needed to be carefully applied to the three persons of the Trinity. He used the word *substantia* to describe the fundamental unity within the Godhead. However diverse the roles of Father, Son and Spirit, the three persons are identical in substance. They have a basic unity of life and purpose that is intent upon our salvation.

It is from these Latin roots that the creeds describe the Trinity as three persons of one substance. Our Salvation Army doctrine, similarly describes ‘three persons...undivided in essence’.

ii. Eastern Orthodoxy

Is it more important to think of God as one or as three? To lean towards the one reminds us of the unity of Father, Son and Spirit in God’s whole plan of salvation. But it may fail to give due glory to the persons of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit; they become mere agents of the Father. To lean towards the three emphasises the uniqueness and lordship of each of the three persons in the Trinity. But there may be the temptation to exalt one person, for example the Holy Spirit, at the expense of the others.

It is in the eastern orthodox tradition that we find the greatest emphasis on the three persons in the Trinity. This is partly because of the Greek language in which eastern theologians worked. Much less precise than Latin, Greek allowed early thinkers a measure of flexibility in working through the divine relationship. Instead of using the Greek equivalent of the word *persona*, which was *prosopon*, Greek thinkers used *hypostasis*, a word that implied a being of more substance and individuality than a mere ‘mode’. Even so, they were careful to maintain the essential divine unity. Athanasius’ word *homoousios* – of one substance – remained the essential key to that understanding.

The primary theologians in this tradition were the Cappadocian Fathers, Basil of Caesarea (c330-379), Gregory of Nazianzen (c329-389) and Gregory of Nyssa (c330-395). Their understanding of *hypostasis* was especially important in their defence of the divinity of the Holy Spirit, whom, they said, the Bible clearly described as Lord and giver of life. The Holy Spirit shared with the Father and the Son the same divinity, in a similar way that Peter, James and John shared the same humanity. They were of one substance.

iii. Augustine

Undoubtedly the greatest theologian of early western Christianity was Bishop Augustine of Hippo (354-430). His teaching on the Trinity emphasised the unity of the Godhead and the equality of Father, Son and Holy Spirit throughout eternity. He identified God the Father with the creator, God the Son with wisdom, and God the Holy Spirit with love, through which God binds people to himself. He used the interior life of human beings, who are the height of God’s creation, as his analogy for the relationship between the three persons. Just as a human being recognises within himself a triad of mind, knowledge and love (or memory, understanding and will), so God the creator is one-in-three, a trinity of Father, Son and Spirit.

This understanding reveals several distinctions from the eastern orthodox approach. It is not as easy to see the Son and the Spirit as separate persons within the Trinity, so concerned was Augustine to emphasise their unity with the Father. This is particularly true with regard to the Holy Spirit who is seen almost as a quality, binding people to God and the persons of the Trinity together. Augustine’s choice to use the interior life of a single human being, rather than three human beings, as his analogy for the Godhead likewise emphasised the deep, inner unity that he saw between Father, Son and Spirit. (See the Further Discussion section of chapter 5, The Holy Spirit, Lord and giver of Life.)

iv. The Filioque Controversy

From the 4th century, western and eastern Christianity has reflected the difference in emphasis their great thinkers made in their understanding of the Trinity. Eastern Christianity, following the influence of the Cappadocian Fathers, has emphasised the distinctiveness of the three persons of the Trinity. Western Christianity, following Augustine, has preferred to concentrate on the deep inner unity of the Godhead and the complex inner relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In the Middle Ages, this was brought to a head in a further dispute over the Nicene Creed. Western Christians began to recite that the Holy Spirit 'proceeds from the Father *and the Son*' (*filioque*), an addition not present in the original creed. The aim was to emphasise the divine unity, but, in the minds of eastern Christians, it failed to give due weight to the full person of the Holy Spirit. This difference of understanding has remained between these two centres of Christianity to this day.

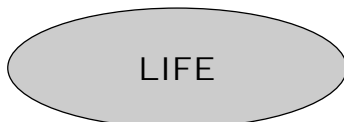
c) Modern Times

During the Reformation John Calvin emphasised the doctrine of the Trinity in his disputes with Servetus and Gribaldi. He recognised that it was essential to the doctrine of redemption. It was essential because of its witness to the divinity of Jesus Christ and to the salvation he provided.

In the 20th century, the question of the Trinity once again came to the forefront of Christian theology. This can largely be attributed to the work of Karl Barth, who believed that everything we know about God comes to us by revelation – the saving revelation of Jesus. God reveals himself as Trinity: as revealer (the Father), as the form in which that revelation is given to us (the Son) and as the one who enables us to receive the revelation (the Holy Spirit). This definition of Father, Son and Holy Spirit clearly makes the Trinity a foundational doctrine, the basis for the whole saving activity of God. It emphasises the unity of God, essentially the one who reveals himself, and so follows the western understanding developed from Augustine.

Some other approaches to the doctrine have tended to emphasise the significance of the three persons of the Godhead, especially in the development of what is called the social Trinity. Various modern thinkers have seen the concept of God as one yet three as a model for human relationships, where unity and diversity are affirmed. Phrases such as 'a community of being', 'community of love' and 'social model' are used by those who are especially seeking to relate Christian truth to modern concerns for a just and fair society. Such writers have included Leonard Hodgson, Jurgen Moltmann and Leonardo Boff.

When we think of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we are facing mystery. But it is a mystery that speaks to us and draws from us the response of our heart. In our worship, we contemplate the mercy of the one who is Creator, Redeemer and Life-giver, eternally one and eternally three. In our ministry, we reflect the love of the one who loved us into existence, loved us to the point of death and who loves us continually. In our fellowship, we acknowledge our diversity as we care for one another, while safeguarding the unity upon which our faith is built.



1. *Life-style and ethics*

If the heart of God is loving fellowship, and we are made in his likeness, how would you respond to:

- a) a corps that is inward looking in its activity and its prayer life?
- b) a Salvationist who spends so much time at the corps that family and social obligations are compromised?

2. *The mission of the Church*

If it is in the nature of God to reveal himself to all people, how can we share in his mission and tell his story to those outside our fellowship?

3. *Personal Ministry*

How can I use my gifts to advance the salvation story in a way that honours the community-making God?

- a) How can I best tell the story?
- b) In what ways can I express God's love through action and service?
- c) What should I pray for?

WORSHIP

Read the section of the chapter entitled: *The human response: worship* (*Salvation Story* pages 19-21). Either on your own or in a group, use one or two of the following ideas.

1. Read *1 Chronicles 29:10-13* and say/share together The Lord's Prayer, concentrating especially on the final phrases: 'For thine is the Kingdom and the power and the glory, for ever and ever.' Music from Handel's *Messiah* ('And the glory of the Lord....') or from contemporary worship songs may be included here.
2. Use song number 10 (SASB) 'Joyful, joyful we adore thee' to focus on the glory of God seen through creation. Pictures, arrangements, video presentations may be useful here.
3. Read *Psalms 103*. List/share together all the loving actions of God that the Psalm describes. Read together verses 19-22 of the Psalm as a prayer of adoration.
4. Look at the summary of this chapter on page 22, *Salvation Story*, and re-write it in your own words in one or two sentences. Share your version with each other. Thank God for helping us to believe in him as the one, triune God.
5. Create a visual presentation, using, for example, audio-visual techniques, dance, drama, video, etc. entitled, 'The Community-making God'.

Further suggestions for Scripture and from the SASB:

Romans 11:33-36

2 Corinthians 3:17-4:6

224 Thou whose almighty Word

640 To God be the glory, a Saviour is mine

BIBLE STUDIES

Before engaging in discussion, read the appropriate section of the text along with suggested Bible references under the heading indicated.

1. *Christian monotheism*

Deuteronomy 6:4-5 is quoted by Jesus as the greatest commandment (*Mark 12:28-34*). Why do you think he did so and how did he exemplify its teaching in his own life and ministry?

2. *A God in fellowship*

Look at *2 Corinthians 13:14*.

- a) What is Paul saying about each person in the Godhead in this verse?
- b) Why is this verse important for our image of God as Father, Son and Spirit?
- c) This is a blessing. How does the blessing come home to you?

3. *A God who makes himself known*

Does *Hosea 11:1-4* suggest ways in which God has made himself known in your life?

4. A God involved with us

Read *Jonah 4:1-11*. Can you identify with Jonah's anger or resentment over God's unwelcome involvement with him and the people of Nineveh? What does this story indicate about the extent of God's love?

5. The character of God

Does the description of God as a jealous God (*Exodus 20:5*) fit in with your understanding or experience of God?

With reference to *1 John 5:20*, can you think of ways in which Jesus, in his life and ministry, revealed the true, consistent character of God?

6. The glory of God

With reference to *2 Corinthians 4:3-6*, how do you think Christians can transmit and share the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ?

7. The human response: worship

What does *Romans 12:1-2* say about the way in which we worship God? What undermines true worship?

8. The danger of idolatry

With reference to *Colossians 3:5*, to what extent do greed, evil desires, lust, impurity and sexual immorality reflect the idolatries of the present day? Is this an exhaustive list?

9. Sermon series suggestions

- a) A number of section headings in this chapter would make a sermon series.

For example, The God who is never alone:

- i. A God in fellowship (*Salvation Story* pages 15-16) – *Matthew 11:25-27*
- ii. A God who makes himself known (*Salvation Story* pages 16-17) – *Psalms 126*
- iii. A God involved with us (*Salvation Story* pages 17-18) – *Nehemiah 9:9-17*
- iv. A God to make known (*Salvation Story* page 22) – *1 Peter 2:9-10*

- b) What is our response to:

- i. the saving God?
- ii. the seeking God?
- iii. the sanctifying God?
- iv. the merciful God?
- v. the community-making God?
- vi. the loving God? (*Salvation Story* pages 20-21)

SALVATION STORY STUDY GUIDE

CHAPTER THREE

Creator of Heaven and earth

The doctrine of God the Father

Related Doctrines

We believe that there is only one God, who is infinitely perfect, the creator; Preserver and Governor of all things, and who is the only proper object of religious worship.

We believe that there are three Persons in the Godhead – the Father; the Son and the Holy Ghost, undivided in essence and co-equal in power and glory.

N.B. – Before commencing on the following study guide for chapter three of *Salvation Story*, read the chapter in the Handbook in its entirety, including each of the Scripture references.

BELIEF

1. Historical summary

a) Father

Historically, there is a strong linkage in human thought between God understood as Creator and named as 'Father'. This is found in many developed societies, and in every continent.

The understanding of God as Father has also frequently been seen as giving him proprietary rights over his 'children'. Consequently the title 'Father' implied 'Lord' or 'Master', one who could command obedience, and at whose disposition all life was subject.

In contrast to this universal understanding of God as father and governor of all humans – and by extension of the whole of creation – Israel generally reserved the fatherhood of God to refer exclusively to his covenant relationship with the nation of Israel.

The understanding of the character of the Father developed through the Old Testament, especially in the teaching of the 8th century BC prophets and the Psalms, towards the full revelation brought by Jesus. A particularly good example of this development can be seen in the prophecy of Hosea. The prophet depicts God speaking of Israel as a beloved child and recalling the Exodus with the imagery of a parent teaching a toddler to walk. God guided Israel 'as with leading reins': 'with cords of human kindness, with ties of love' (*Hosea 11:1-4*). God is bound to his wayward people with an unquenchable love which will end in their repentance and restoration (*Hosea 11:5-11*).

The fatherhood of God is seen in even more personal terms in the Psalms. He is more than the father of his chosen people in a general relationship, such as the gods of other nations were regarded as the 'father' of those races. His caring action extends to individuals. In particular, he is the father who cares for the most vulnerable in society: 'a father to the fatherless, a defender of widows' (*Psalms 68:5*). Although God is wholly other, almighty and implacable in his righteousness, yet the very frailty and humanity of his people evokes tender longsuffering and a readiness to forgive those who respond to him with respect and a willingness to obey. 'As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him' (*Psalms 103:13*).

The understanding of God as father in Christian doctrine is formed by Jesus' relationship as son as revealed in the New Testament. The particular focus of Jesus was that of the intimate, trusting relationship seen between a growing child and a revered, adored parent.

This new intimacy was communicated by the Holy Spirit to those who put their faith in Jesus. It marked the Christians' understanding of the Creator and Lord of all, the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, as source, sustainer and fulfiller of their new life in Christ. This intimacy which we can have with God as father speaks with great power and meaning today in a world in which the concept and role of fatherhood is often devalued or absent.

b) Creator

All Christians agree and confess that God is the creator of all that is. He created everything out of nothing (*ex nihilo*) for his glory. Christians agree on the 'who' and 'why', as discussed in *Salvation Story* chapters two and three. There is sometimes an unnecessary conflict between Christians who adhere to different explanations as to the 'how' of creation.

Those who are comfortable with the straightforward record of Scripture as satisfying all we need to know of God's creative work will guard against closing their minds to observable facts about creation's history and mechanisms. Those who are at ease with widely accepted scientific theories of the day concerning the 'how' of creation will guard against failing to see God's initiative, providence and purpose in a creation revealing his sovereignty and glory. For all of us there needs to be a care for truth. We should also respect our God-given ability for reflection, debate and the constant restructuring of ideas in order to approach a clearer understanding of reality.

2. The importance of the doctrine for the Christian faith

The fatherhood of God is revealed by Jesus Christ in his relationship as son with his father God. The Gospels show the way in which Jesus trusted, obeyed, and learned from his Father God. The supreme example of both his trust and obedience is seen in his willingness to accept the Cross. His attention to God's way of working with his creation is seen in many parables which show the nature of God. For example, the parable of the lilies of the field show how Jesus read from the observable creation a lesson of confidence and trust in God's providential care. From the story of his boyhood visit to the Temple (*Luke 2:41-53*) and subsequent accounts of his skilful use of the Hebrew Scriptures it is evident that Jesus used these ancient writings to seek, discover and obey the will of God. Above all, in his prayer life Jesus showed that he loved and relied upon his Father God with entire confidence.

As Christians receive, by a gift of the Holy Spirit, the privilege of adoption as a child of God (*Romans 8:15; John 1:12*), so they experience and develop a child/parent relationship with God. It is this that defines Christian experience, character and conduct as we become more Christlike. Like Jesus we can enjoy intimate prayer with, joyous obedience of, and restful trust in God our Father.

As we learn that God is Creator, Preserver and Governor of all that he has made, we discover the ground of human hope and the basis of Christian ethics. The observable creation, of which we are a part, is not the consequence of a mindless accident but a planned work which is being shaped by a loving God to achieve his ultimate will. As we are part of his good purpose, so we can have confidence in our own destiny. We can discover the worth of all human beings, and the value of all life that he has made. We can be confident that what he has created he will not abandon or destroy. As his children we will recognise our responsibility to take care of all life: environment, plant and animal life as well as the welfare of our fellow human beings.

Knowing that God is governor of all that he has made will convince us that he will hold us accountable for how we live: in community, in relationship to all living creatures as well as to the whole of our natural environment. That we are accountable for how we live, and answerable to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus will undergird all Christian ethics.

3. The essentials of the doctrine

The doctrine clarifies the relationship between God and his creation generally and with us in particular. He is our Father and Creator.

By revealing God as the source and sustainer of life, the doctrine provides a key to understand its nature. The chief benefit is that this knowledge enables us, by sympathetic cooperation with God, to work with the direction and flow of life. This helps us to avoid engaging in conduct that works against the tide of God's creation. Instead, we adopt life-enhancing strategies that allow God to fulfill his purposes for us.

We also benefit from the knowledge that God as Governor has an ultimate purpose for creation as well as ongoing creative strategies. This gives us hope that all will be well, both for the world and also for us personally (*Genesis 45:5; 50:19-21; Romans 8:18-25; 1 Corinthians 15:58*).

God is the guarantor of life and the rewarder of those who, even in the midst of suffering, by their cooperative participation in his work, fulfill his life-enriching purpose. (For further discussion of suffering see section 6.)

4. Issues for Salvationists

The stern fact is that we are all accountable to God for the use we make of our lives and opportunities. This not only requires us to discover and do his will ourselves, but also to warn the unsaved of the coming judgement and their need for salvation in order to escape wrath and discover the purpose of their lives. It also gives urgency to the mission of the Army.

The discovery of the great love of God our Father is not only our personal strength and joy, but a message deeply needed by millions. There are many hurting as a consequence of both their own sin and the wrongdoing of others. They need to know that they are loved and given infinite worth by a God who has made them by and for his love.

The compassion of the Army's social action and caring depends upon an understanding that God is Father of all without discrimination or partiality. In particular we will recognise in Scripture a divine emphasis on the pressing needs of the poor and underprivileged. This 'bias to the poor' gives a priority to the mission of the Christian Church and has been recognised and acted upon by the Army since its founding days.

5. Discussion questions

1. Jesus taught us to see God as Father: how is this image helpful to you personally? Does this have any difficulties for you?
2. How does the teaching and life of Jesus transform the biblical concept of God as Father?
3. How does your observation of God's creation enrich your understanding of the Creator?
4. How does Jesus' teaching about evil, and his triumph over it, help you cope with:
 - a) the effects of 'natural' disaster?
 - b) the deliberate wickedness of evil people?
 - c) the activity of powers and/or structures hostile to life and goodness?
5. 'I'm not outside thy providential care' (SASB 761): discuss.
6. Relate your own experience of an awareness of God's holy presence.
7. Explore ways in which the teaching in *Salvation Story* concerning God's *love, power and suffering* can help you make sense of, and transcend, the adverse happenings in your own experience of life (*Salvation Story* pages 33-34).

6. Further discussion

a) The problem of suffering

Suffering is both an intellectual problem and an experiential challenge to faith. 'How can a loving God allow suffering?' is the primary question of theodicy. (Theodicy: how to maintain that God is love in the face of innocent suffering.)

b) The Old Testament and suffering

The Bible gives interpretations of suffering which can be a help to us both when we are thinking through the intellectual problem of theodicy and when we are facing a terrible personal reality. In the Old Testament there are several interpretations.

In *Genesis 1-3* we see that the world was intended to be a good place. Disobedience opened the door to pain and suffering and there has been pain and suffering in the world ever since. We were all born into a world in which we are vulnerable to suffering.

A number of texts offer **another perspective** on human suffering (*Exodus 34:6-7; Numbers 14:18; Deuteronomy 5:9-10*). The idea is that the cycle of sin is perpetuated from generation to generation. We are paying for the sins of our forefathers and we are acting in a way that will bring misery to generations following us. Sin has consequences. There is a cause-and-effect relationship built into creation.

The **prophets of the pre-exilic period** (Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel) identified the injustice and idolatry of their society. They made a connection between the sins of the people, especially the leaders of the people, and the national disaster which was coming. In a situation like this there is no escape for the pious or the righteous. All suffer.

In **Deuteronomy** there is a clear message that the Law must be obeyed or there will be grave consequences. If it is kept, there will be prosperity and long life. There are a series of blessings and curses in chapters 27 and 28. In *Deuteronomy 30:15-20* there is a good summary of the viewpoint of the book: God has given a choice, the people of God can choose good, and so live long in the land, or choose evil and consequently be driven out of the land.

There is a strong corporate sense in these interpretations, and there is no focus on the individual's suffering and the relationship to the person's obedience. God is active in the world to execute justice, even to the extent that he uses enemies to torment the disobedient. The Deuteronomic understanding of God's part in human suffering keeps a balance between God's power and justice.

During the exile and after, the response was different. The catastrophe of the exile made the previous interpretation less credible. The disaster was too severe and lasted too long. *Chapter 18* of **Ezekiel** is crucial (see also *Jeremiah 31:29-30*). The chapter seems to indicate a move of the doctrine of retribution away from a strictly corporate understanding. We need not be swept along by the sins of society or our own family. Individuals make their own decisions and determine their own future. There is a tension between what Ezekiel is saying and the earlier understanding that we can expect to bear the sins of the forefathers to the third and fourth generation. What Ezekiel wants to stress is that the present situation cannot be excused by claiming that it was predetermined in the past and therefore we cannot be held accountable for our own actions. Ezekiel wants to underline our individual accountability.

Troubled by the seeming excessive suffering of Israel, **Isaiah** (*chapters 40-55*), did not reject that the suffering of the people was punishment for sin, but he added that suffering should not be defined only in negative terms. If the people have the faith to see it, they might discover that their suffering is part of God's work in the world. They are the witnesses of God (*43:9-10*), called to be a 'light to the nations' (*42:6; 49:6*). God will work some greater good for others out of the suffering of the faithful. This is the concept of a group or one suffering for others – vicarious suffering as in *Isaiah 53:4-6*.

The **book of Job** examines in great detail answers that earlier traditions had to offer in order to find meaning in suffering. Here Job's friends set out both the corporate retribution and the individualised interpretations of suffering as punishment. Job rejects all the answers. He wants the law of retribution to work, but it doesn't, so he protests that he is the victim of injustice. Reading the book it is clear that Job is a case of innocent suffering. He does not deserve his fate. God answers with a 'no answer'. The imagery of the wonders of creation points to the presence and care of God in the world even when we cannot clearly see God's activity either in our personal or corporate history. Job is content to live with the mystery and leave the unknown in the hands of God whom he can trust.

The conclusion of the book of Job is an attempt to live with the mystery and be willing not to push the logic of theodicy to the point where we must blame humans in order to protect God's justice and power, or doubt God's justice in order to protect our integrity (*Job 42:1-2*).

The willingness to live with unanswered questions can also be seen in the **Psalms of lament**. Here it is the relationship with God that is important, even in times of suffering. We lament, but trust God (*Psalms 88*).

In the Old Testament it is rare to mention the **demonic** as a contributor to suffering. That is primarily seen in three places: *Job 1-2*; *1 Chronicles 21*; *Zechariah 3*. These passages point to the relationship between the problem of evil and the problem of suffering. (See *Salvation Story* page 28, 'The problem of evil'.)

In **Apocalyptic writings**, for example the book of Daniel, the distant future is seen as the time when justice will be finally achieved. Suffering is seen as something to be expected in the present age which is under the dominion of evil powers.

c) The New Testament and suffering

For the early Christians the big question is how to make sense of the suffering of Jesus and how to understand the suffering they themselves experienced. The New Testament deals with this dilemma.

It showed that the disciples persistently failed to understand the coming suffering of Christ and his redemptive mission (*Matthew 16:21-23*), but after the resurrection they understood the necessity for his atoning suffering (*Luke 24:13-35*). His suffering was the focal point of the preaching of the apostles (*Acts 2:23*; *17:3*; *26:22-23*) and in the letters of Paul (*2 Corinthians 5:15*; *Ephesians 5:2*).

The suffering of Jesus was for a greater good – the salvation of the human race (*John 3:16*). The followers of Jesus should be willing to suffer for the sake of spreading the gospel (*John 13:12-17*; *15:18-21*). The suffering could be interpreted as suffering for others.

Even though Christians share the experience of suffering with all mankind, there is the difference that God makes use of it, gives meaning to it and to their response to suffering (*Hebrews 12:5, 11-13*). Christians are not saved from suffering, but saved in suffering and sustained by the fact that Christ suffers with them (*Acts 9:4-5*; *1 Corinthians 12:26-17*).

The New Testament clearly rejects the doctrine of retribution which connects sin with punishment, either individual or corporate (*John 9:1-3*).

There is an underlying attitude that in a corrupt world the ones who appear to have success may be the evil ones who have come unjustly to their reward (*Luke 6:20-26*). Suffering may be a sign that you are one of the faithful, rather than being the consequence of a sinful life (*Luke 2:51-55*; *Acts 14:22*).

In the midst of suffering there is the promise of resurrection and of the day of judgement. Justice will finally be done. There is an assurance that God can work good even out of suffering (*2 Corinthians 12:7-10*). Paul said that it was even possible to rejoice in our suffering (*Romans 8:17-18*). We can look back and realise that lessons have been learned and that God's presence has been with us even in the depths of suffering.

It should be pointed out that the Gospels relate some suffering to the demonic. In the three Synoptic Gospels casting out of demons was a significant aspect of Jesus' ministry. It indicated the arrival of the Kingdom and was the most powerful expression of his healing ministry. Various kinds of illness were attributed to the working of evil spirits. They caused violently insane behaviour (*Matthew 8:28*; *Mark 5:1-5*), the inability to speak (*Matthew 9:32*) or to hear (*Mark 9:25*), blindness (*Matthew 12:22*), characteristics of epilepsy (*Luke 9:39*) and apparent tendencies to self-destruction (*Matthew 17:15*). It is not that all illness is attributed to the presence of evil spirits, rather that all three Gospels (*Matthew 4:24*; *Mark 1:32*; *Luke 7:21*) list the demonised as a category separate from those suffering with other diseases. Mark especially differentiated between the two and never uses the word 'to heal' in connection with demons.

In the Gospel of John there are no references to the casting out of demons. In the rest of the New Testament the references to demons have the focus on their moral and spiritual opposition to believers rather than the kind of physical affliction which is mentioned in the Synoptic Gospels.

d) Suffering in Christian theology – Does God suffer?

Due to the Greek influence in the world where Christianity spread, the classic pagan idea of the impassibility of God came into Christian theology. This is the view that God lies beyond all human emotions and pain.

Anselm of Canterbury was influenced by this idea, and he argued that God was compassionate in terms of our experience, but not in terms of his own divine being: 'For when you see us in our misery, we experience the effect of compassion; you, however, do not experience this feeling' (*Proslogion*).

Martin Luther in his *Theology of the Cross* protested against this. In the 'Heidelberg Disputation' (1518) Luther contrasts two ways of thinking about God: 'the theology of glory' and 'the theology of the Cross'. Luther uses the phrase 'a crucified God' as he speaks of the manner in which God shares in the suffering of the crucified Christ.

Just after the First World War, in the 1920s, when the horrors of war made a deep impact on Christian theology, there was a renewed interest in Martin Luther's scholarship and his ideas, and 'the theology of the Cross' especially came into focus.

In 1974, Jürgen Moltmann published his book *The Crucified God* in which he argues that a God who cannot suffer is a deficient, imperfect God. He stresses that God cannot be forced to change or undergo suffering, but that God willed to do so. The suffering of God is the direct consequence of the divine decision to suffer, and the divine willingness to suffer. The Cross is both the foundation and the criterion of true Christian theology. The Cross must be seen as an event between the Father and the Son, in which the Father suffers the death of his Son in order to redeem sinful humanity.

A God who cannot suffer is poorer than any human. For a God who is incapable of suffering is a being who cannot be involved. Suffering and injustice do not affect him. And because he is so completely insensitive, he cannot be affected or shaken by anything. He cannot weep, for he has no tears. But the one who cannot suffer cannot love either. So he is a loveless being. (*The Crucified God*.)

The Japanese writer Kazoh Kitamori argued in his book *A Theology of the Pain of God* (1947) that true love was rooted in pain. God is able to give meaning and dignity to human suffering on account of the fact that he is also in pain and suffers. Kitamori distinguishes the ways in which Father and Son suffer.

God the Father who hid himself in the death of God the Son is God in pain. Therefore the pain of God is neither merely the pain of God the Son, nor merely the pain of God the Father, but the pain of two persons who are essentially one.

Both Moltmann and Kitamori draw heavily upon Luther's 'theology of the Cross'.

In a century where we have been witnesses to an abyss of human suffering and madness, the problem of evil and of suffering has been put to the forefront of theology. Auschwitz, the horrors of Stalin's regime and Vietnam have challenged theologians to reflect and to address the problem. The genocide which occurred in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia has been a challenge for us.

While Moltmann and Kitamori were challenged by the Holocaust, the German theologian Dorothee Sölle, living as a German in the shadow of Auschwitz, saw things repeating themselves in the suffering of the people during the Vietnam War, which led her to a political engagement and theology. Her theology on suffering, in which she takes up a dialogue with different thinkers such as Søren Kierkegaard, Kitamori and Dostojevski, is unfolded in *Leiden (Suffering)* 1973. Her book explores the possibility of the powerlessness of God.

Well known to many people is C.S. Lewis's *The Problem of Pain* (1940) and even more his *A Grief Observed*. In recent years there has been a focus on C.S. Lewis through the film *Shadowlands*. In *The Problem of Pain* he is dealing with pain seen in the light of God's love. His conclusion in the book is that God inserts pain in our lives in order to awaken us: 'But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.'

In *A Grief Observed*, which is portrayed in the film he experiences the emptiness of this statement when pain is a personal experience. Here there is a growing acknowledgement of our limited understanding, but a certainty of God's presence. There is no real conclusion apart from this. Pain teaches us to love and to be loved.

Lesser known is the Japanese theologian Kosuke Koyama whose book *No Handle on the Cross* (1976) gave an Asian interpretation of the mental anguish of the crucifixion.

The crucified Lord demonstrates 'the foolishness of God' which is stronger than men. The immensely costly foolishness! The immensely saving weakness! To know this always, to be guided by this always, and constantly to train oneself to appreciate this 'foolishness and weakness of God' is the secret joy and strength of the crucified mind. The crucified mind is the mind shaken by the 'foolishness and weakness of God'.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn addresses the problem of suffering in his novels. In his book *Cancer Ward* he tells the story of a number of people, and these stories reveal immense suffering. In the chapter 'Of beauty reminiscing', the story of the old exiled couple Kadmins is told. They had been through labour camps, years and years of separation in exile and were now together but still sentenced to exile in perpetuity. Their original offence was that the mother-in-law took a deserting soldier into her house for two days. The soldier got amnesty after the war, but they were enemies of the people for ever. But their life blossomed in spite of poverty and hardship. Elena, the wife says, 'Life is so good'. And the comment following that is, 'And obviously she was right. It is not our level of prosperity that makes for happiness but the kinship of heart to heart and the way we look at the world. Both attitudes lie within our power, so that a man is happy so long as he chooses to be happy, and no one can stop him.'

It is very much the same message which comes through another one of his books, *One day in the life of Ivan Denisovich*. The simple life is a protection against suffering and so is the will to endure and to live intensely in spite of suffering, even though the suffering is immense as seen from outside.

LIFE

1. *Lifestyle and ethics*

If God has made me for an eternal purpose, how can I discover and follow his plan for living? If all people are part of that same purpose, how can I facilitate others in their quest for meaning?

2. *Mission of the Church*

If God is author and completer of all creation, how can the Church best avoid reducing the Christian faith to a mere 'religion'. In other words how do Christians ensure that their faith leads them to commit their lives to a creative involvement with life and the world?

How can the Church best combat evils in society? (Discussion may be facilitated by a focus on one particular evil.)

3. *Personal ministry*

How can I become better informed of the wonders of God's creation with a view to bringing honour to the Creator?

Devise a practical programme for overcoming evil with good.

WORSHIP

1. Re-read the sections on 'Love and power' and 'Love, power and suffering'. Then reflect on the love of God as Father revealed in Christ crucified.

2. Nourish hope in your heart by considering the nature of God who is your beginning and your end, the author of your life, the redeemer of your present days and the giver to you of fruitful life throughout eternity.

3. Open yourself to the love of God your Father, allowing his total acceptance of you in Jesus Christ to banish your fears. Now allow him to dissolve your hesitations and bring to life all the gifts and graces with which he endows you as his child.

4. Testify without undue delay to what the above has done for you, giving all glory to God. Say what it means to you to know that you are his child.

5. Suggestions for meditation.

a) Scripture readings: *Genesis 1:1-2:2; Psalms 8; 19; 104; Matthew 6:9-13; 1 John 4:7-21.*

b) Songs (SASB)

- 3 All people that on earth do dwell
- 17 Praise my soul, the King of Heaven
- 27 Beyond the farthest bounds of earth
- 42 This is my Father's world
- 51 Love has a language all its own making
- 279 Whosoever heareth! Shout, shout the sound

c) Poetry

Search for poetry expressing the wonders of God's creation and other themes of this chapter:

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, Samuel Taylor Coleridge

The Lord Jehovah reigns, Isaac Watts

Amazing beauteous change!, Philip Doddridge

God's Autographs, William L. Stidger

Omniscience, Mabel Brown Denison

God's Grandeur, Gerard Manley Hopkins

BIBLE STUDIES

Read the Scripture references to determine how they relate to the section headings.

1. *God the Father*

Consider the work of the Holy Spirit in *Romans 8:15* as illumined by Jesus' relationship with his Father as recorded in *John 14-17*. (You may wish to select a particular passage from these chapters, for example, *chapter 17* or *15:9-17*.)

2. *Creator of Heaven and earth*

- a) Creation out of nothing
Refer to *Psalms 33:6* and discuss how the prologue in *John 1:1-18* clarifies this description of creation.
- b) The problem of evil
Discover the contrasts and agreements of *Genesis 3* and *Romans 1:18-32*.

3. *Preserver and Governor*

- a) In view of what you have learned from the Scriptures in this section, discuss in what way God can be said to govern his creation, with special reference to the way he governs us.
- b) Caring for God's world. In what way can Christians impact the cause of protecting the environment? Discuss the way in which the prophecy of Joel, especially *Joel 1:15-20*, can clarify this topic.

4. *Perfect in holiness*

Consider *Isaiah 6:1-7* in conjunction with *Revelation 4:1-11* and discover how John enhances our understanding of God's majestic holiness. Then determine if this richer picture makes more crucial our response in company with the prophet.

5. Perfect in Wisdom

Reflect on *Proverbs 8:22-36* in conjunction with *1 Corinthians 1:18-31*. How does the teaching that Jesus is the Wisdom of God help us to understand the Father's mind. (See *Romans 11:33-36*.)

6. Perfect in power

Link *Isaiah 40:21-24* with Mary's song *Luke 1:46-55* and discuss how God's power is exercised to frustrate evil regimes and/or individuals.

7. Perfect in love

Discuss how the prophet Hosea, especially *Hosea 3:1*, has advanced our understanding of God's love.

8. Love and power

From a study of *Isaiah 52:13-53:12* discover how perfectly God's love both denies and affirms himself.

9. Love, power and suffering

Read *Luke 24:25-27* and *1 Peter 2:20b-23*. Say how this relates to your own experience or that of someone close to you.

10. Sermon series suggestions

- | | |
|-----------------------|--|
| God the Creator | - in the beginning
- in recreation (salvation)
- in the end (new Heaven and earth) |
| God's covenanted love | - fidelity in creation
- constancy in betrayal
- compassion in judgement |

SALVATION STORY STUDY GUIDE

CHAPTER FOUR

God's eternal Son

The doctrine of Jesus Christ

Related Doctrines

We believe that there are three persons in the Godhead – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, undivided in essence and co-equal in power and glory.

We believe that in the person of Jesus Christ the Divine and human natures are united, so that He is truly and properly God and truly and properly man.

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ has by His suffering and death made an atonement for the whole world so that whosoever will may be saved.

N.B. – Before commencing on the following study guide for chapter four of *Salvation Story*, read the chapter in the Handbook in its entirety, including each of the Scripture references.

BELIEF

1. Historical Summary

Christians believe in Jesus Christ and affirm both his humanity and his divinity, united in one person. This belief is central to the Christian faith. Yet it has been the subject of considerable debate throughout the centuries. Some argue that if Jesus was God come to earth, he cannot have been truly human. Others ask, if Jesus was a real human being, in what sense can he be considered to be God?

a) Biblical background

There is clear New Testament witness to Jesus' true humanity as well as to his historical existence. (See *Salvation Story* pages 36-37.) But the New Testament is far more than the record of the life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. It is 'the record which sets these events in the light of eternity, proclaiming the Lord Jesus Christ as incarnate Son of God' (*Handbook of Doctrine*, 1969, page 49). The New Testament is suffused throughout with resurrection faith. In the Gospels where Jesus' story is told, every writer, while reflecting on the mission of the man, Jesus, tells his story through the eyes of his faith in Jesus Christ as risen Lord. The Gospel of Mark, for example, while emphasising Jesus' true humanity, commences with the words, 'The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God' (*Mark 1:1*).

Even so, a careful reading of the Gospels reveals significant characteristics in Jesus' teaching and actions that alerted his hearers to ask questions about his origin as well as his mission. First, they emphasise his unique authority. In his teaching ministry, Jesus felt no need to defer to others, as was usual for the rabbis of his day. He spoke on his own authority (*Mark 1:21-28; Matthew 5:21-22*). Second, he called men to follow him, he did not wait for disciples to seek him out (*Mark 1:16-20*). Third, he performed miracles that provoked speculation about him (*Mark 4:35-41*). Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, he forgave sins (*Mark 2:1-12*).

The Gospels also point to Jesus' special relationship with God his Father, whom he called *Abba*, Father (*Mark 14:36*). This was something he was aware of very early in his life (*Luke 2:48-50*). It was especially evident

during his passion (*Mark 14:36*). John's Gospel particularly stresses Jesus' utter dependence on God (*John 5:19,30*), his complete obedience to his Father (*John 8:28*), and the way in which he identified himself utterly with the purpose and the character of God (*John 8:58; 10:30*). The ultimate, crucial test of Jesus' obedience to God lay in his complete self-offering on the Cross (*Mark 14:36; John 10:17-18*). Here we rightly recognise, not only the obedience of Jesus, but the love of God himself (*1 John 4:10*), a love vindicated by Jesus' Resurrection from death. The early Christians proclaimed that Jesus is the man whom 'God raised to life' and who is 'exalted to the right hand of God' (*Acts 21:32-33*). From this moment a new understanding of Jesus' person began to emerge. In *Romans 1:4* Paul speaks of Jesus 'who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God'.

The New Testament writers bear witness to their understanding of the divinity of Christ by ascribing to him various names and titles taken from the religious and secular environment in which they lived. These titles help us to understand how the Church came to terms with all that the Resurrection proclaimed about Jesus. They witness that Jesus fulfilled the purpose of God with the authority of God, and express the Christians' conviction that in Jesus Christ, God himself has visited us. (See *Salvation Story* Appendix 5, pages 46-49.)

b) The Early Church Fathers

In the early centuries of the Christian Church, the divinity of Jesus was not generally in question. People in the ancient world were able to comprehend the coming of the divine in human form more easily than we can. The difficulty they had was to explain Jesus' true humanity. How can God become man? One way to explain this was to suggest that Jesus was not a true man at all, but was God come to earth disguised in some way as a human being. This is the heresy of *docetism* (from the Greek word *dokein* – to seem, suggesting that Jesus only seemed to be a human being). Such teaching has appeared in various forms throughout the history of the Church.

Docetism was a feature of one of the most persistent heretical sets of belief that came to the fore in the first and second centuries, that of *gnosticism*. Most gnostics held a dualistic view of reality, regarding matter as the realm of evil and spirit as the realm of good. They made a distinction between the unknowable true God and the lesser deity who they believed created the world. They believed human beings, created of matter, nevertheless possessed a spark of the divine imprisoned within the outward covering of the body. Redemption was to escape from the earthly prison and be re-united with God. The way to find redemption was through knowledge (*gnosis*). Knowledge once awakened, possibly through a heavenly redeemer, enabled the divine spark, or soul, to ascend through various steps towards its heavenly goal. Some of these ideas reflected the thinking of the hellenistic world, others were corruptions of the teaching of the early Christians.

All of this certainly affected belief about the person of Jesus. So-called 'Christian gnostics' denied the real humanity and actual death of God's eternal Son, since such humanity and death could not be reconciled with deity and immortality. The gnostic heretic, Cerinthus, for example, said that Christ was not truly 'in' the flesh, but only came 'into' the flesh temporarily. He appeared temporarily in the form of a man, but all the time was in essence a heavenly being, not one of flesh and blood. In the New Testament, the first Letter of John particularly seeks to refute this. John speaks of Jesus as 'that which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched' (*1 John 1:1*). Later he characterises as false teaching that which denied that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh (*1 John 4:2*).

Some of the early heresies already referred to in Appendix 4 of *Salvation Story* are docetic by implication. Apollinarianism, for example, was docetic in its attempt to disengage the soul or spirit of Jesus from his human body. Apollinarius, a staunch follower of Athanasius, suggested that in Jesus Christ the Word (Logos) represented the soul, and that at his Incarnation Jesus Christ took residence in the body of a 'soul-less being'. The consequence was that since such a being could not possess a full human nature, Jesus Christ did not become fully man.

There were two main schools of theology in the ancient world, one based in Antioch and one in Alexandria, with two ways of understanding the Incarnation. It was the theologians of the Antioch school who defended Christ's full humanity. They then had to find ways of relating his human and his divine nature. Nestorius, who became Archbishop of Constantinople in 428 but was removed from office in 431 as a heretic, strongly defended Jesus' true humanity as well as his divinity, but did so in such a way as to deny the unity of God and man in one person. His opponent, Eutyches, however, representing the rival teaching based in

Alexandria, confused the divine and human natures so completely that Jesus became neither God nor man, but something in between.

Gradually the early Church realised that defending the true humanity of Jesus was vital to our salvation. If salvation is only possible because God himself has taken on our humanity in order to redeem it, then our total redemption depends on Christ's total humanity. As Gregory of Nazianzus said in a famous phrase: 'What was not assumed was not healed.'

The Chalcedonian definition effectively settled the question until modern times (See *Salvation Story* page 38.). Although expressed in terms that reflect the understanding of an age very far removed from our own, Chalcedon has succeeded in uniting Christians for many centuries in their understanding of Christ's person:

We confess one and the same our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead, the same perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man, the same of a rational soul and body, acknowledged in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation, the difference of the two natures being by no means taken away because of the union but rather the distinctive character of each being preserved and combining in one person or entity.

Chalcedon provides a form of words that helps Christians to hold on to the biblical picture of Jesus Christ in all its mystery and avoid falling into fundamental error. In Jesus we meet one who in his humanity is like ourselves and in his divinity is one with our heavenly Father. The union of these two natures in one complete person is the safeguard for our salvation.

c) The Reformation

At the Reformation, thinking about the person of Christ was closely associated with the main theological concern of the age, the doctrine of salvation. The reformers accepted the teaching of Chalcedon and paid attention to the human life of Jesus, especially to his suffering on the Cross. Martin Luther developed a 'theology of the cross', which emphasised also the humiliation of the man Jesus as he accepted his Father's will. But Jesus suffered not only as man, but as God. Luther used the phrase 'the crucified God', a startling phrase in a society that still thought of the divine as beyond the reach of suffering. In Luther's understanding, the divinity and the humanity of Christ were so intermingled that it is possible to speak of a suffering God and an exalted Saviour.

d) Modern Christology

In the modern period, talk about the person of Jesus has been fundamentally influenced by the Enlightenment. This philosophical movement, which had its beginnings in the 18th century, emphasised the importance of reason, encouraged the development of scientific enquiry, believed in universal progress and rejected the authority of traditional belief. Religious belief became the subject for rational enquiry and there was widespread scepticism about the supernatural. In this cultural atmosphere, which is still recognised in our own day, the divinity rather than the humanity of Jesus became the problem. The question that has surfaced to this present day is not so much how God can become man, but how a man can be considered God. This has led to a fascination with the human life of Jesus and numerous attempts to understand his life in terms of the divine.

Among the many attempts to respond to this question are those which have focussed on the personality of Jesus. He has been presented on one hand as the greatest moral teacher and perfect example and on another as a mysterious, apocalyptic prophet. In such cases it is the power of Jesus' personality that is the catalyst for worship. More radically, some have questioned Jesus' historical existence, or suggested that there is only a tenuous connection between the man who lived and died in Galilee and the one who became the object of worship by the first Christians. They claim there is a distinction between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith.

A more orthodox approach has been found in the kenotic theory (from the Greek for empty, *kenosis*). According to this approach, Jesus was indeed God who became man for us – one who voluntarily surrendered, or emptied himself of all divine attributes in order to become one with humanity. (See

Philippians 2:5-11, especially verse 7). From the opposite perspective others have argued for a man so devoted to God, and so perfectly filled with his grace, that the fullness of God could be perfectly seen in him. (See *Colossians 1:19*). (Some of these approaches are explored in the 'Further Discussion' section.)

Many in the western world today would say that the period of Enlightenment thinking, with its emphasis on the supremacy of reason, is giving way to a new, post-modern age, where spirituality is once more valued and the supernatural more easily accepted. This movement has not yet led many to return to faith in Jesus Christ, so much as to a new paganism. (See *Salvation Story* page 24.) The person of Jesus, the only Son of the Father and the way to salvation, still presents a tremendous challenge in a world strongly influenced by pantheistic thinking. Christian responses to this cultural shift are certainly needed in the 21st century.

2. The importance of the doctrine to Christian faith

The doctrine that Jesus Christ is 'truly and properly God and truly and properly man' is of supreme significance for the Christian faith.

Jesus reveals God to us. If we are to know what God is like, we need one who helps us to talk about him truly and to know him for ourselves. Only Jesus can bring us that knowledge because 'he who has seen me has seen the Father' (*John 14:9*).

Jesus brings God's salvation. Jesus' death on the Cross can only have atoning value as we recognise that, in Jesus, God has offered himself for our salvation. Only the one who has created us has the power to re-create us by a fundamental reconciliation and cleansing from sin (*2 Corinthians 5:19*).

Jesus shows us how to live. Jesus is the believer's true example of a godly life, revealing in himself the likeness to God that is the mark of authentic humanity. He shows us who we are (*Hebrews 2:11*). More than that, through his reconciling work he makes it possible for us to live a truly human life in real obedience to God.

Jesus is the focus of worship and praise. The first disciples were drawn to worship and praise their risen Lord and from there they began to understand his divine nature. It is still true that worship in the name of Jesus focuses our hearts and minds on God and expands our understanding of his grace towards us. (See *Matthew 28:16-20; Luke 24:50-53*.)

3. Issues for Salvationists

The doctrine reinforces the Salvationist's mission. Central to salvationism is the task of calling men and women to new life in Jesus Christ. A true understanding of the person of Jesus equips us for that task and helps us to bring people to a true experience of him.

The doctrine supports the Salvationist's devotional life. To believe in Jesus who is one with the Father, but also understands our human condition, helps us to abide and remain in him as we grow in discipleship.

The doctrine inspires radical discipleship in obedience to Christ. As Jesus' intimate relationship with his heavenly Father was marked by unquestioning obedience, the true disciple seeks to follow Christ without reservation and so do his work and grow into his likeness.

The doctrine encourages the Salvationist's service. We are aware that to call on Christ is to call on one who knows the human situation – who looks with compassion on the sinful and the suffering, and who cares about injustice and evil. When we come alongside others for Christ's sake, we bring the powerful and loving presence of Christ to the centre of human need.

4. Essentials of the doctrine

The essential elements of the doctrine of the Incarnation for all Christians include the following:

- that Jesus in his divine nature is one with God the Father and in his human nature he is one with us;
- that in the person of Jesus Christ these natures are fully and indivisibly united;
- that Jesus lived a complete, fully human life at a particular time in history, died a real death on a cross, and was raised to life;
- that in Jesus, God himself has come to us with the offer of reconciliation and new life.

5. Discussion questions/exercises

- a) Are there elements of the ancient heresies discussed in Section 1 that you recognise as surfacing again today?
- b) In what ways has your own understanding of Jesus as a person developed through your study?
- c) How would you begin to respond to the statement: 'If Jesus was truly human, he could not have been divine'?
- d) Remind yourself or one another of incidents in the Gospels where Jesus showed his compassion for those in need or his concern about injustice or evil. What do such passages tell you about the nature of God?

6. Further Discussion

In spite of the supposed secularisation of many of our societies today, there is no lack of interest in the subject of Jesus Christ. So much is being said and written about him that it is often difficult to understand and evaluate it. At the present time, some of the major questions that are being asked about Jesus are as follows.

a) Who was Jesus?

How much evidence is there for the existence of Jesus? Is the New Testament a reliable record of his life and work? What evidence is there in the ancient writings to corroborate its story? There has been rigorous scrutiny of historical sources over many years and much has been discovered that confirms the Gospel accounts.

Almost everything we know about Jesus comes from the New Testament. But other ancient writings, too, refer to him. For example, the Roman historian, Tacitus, writing in 115 AD, says of the Christians: 'They get their name from Jesus Christ, who was executed by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberias' (*Annals 15:442*). Other Roman historians, notably Pliny and Suetonias refer, if obliquely, to Jesus and the movement he founded.

The most notable ancient historian to speak of Jesus was the Jew, Josephus (born 37 AD), whose history of his own people includes the time of John the Baptist and Jesus and the early Christians. He writes of Jesus:

About this time lived Jesus, a wise man, a teacher of those who delight in accepting the truth. He attracted many Jews, and also many from the Greek world. He was the so-called Christ. On the accusation of our leading men Pilate condemned him to the cross, but those who were attracted to him from the first did not cease to love him. The race of Christians named after him has survived to this day (*Antiquities 18.116- 119*).

With regard to the New Testament itself, there are good reasons for accepting it as a reliable source for knowledge of Jesus. The New Testament writings we have today are substantially those which were written down in the 1st century AD. Large numbers of manuscripts exist, some dating from as early as 350 AD, making the New Testament by far the most reliable ancient document in existence.

Even so, there have been those who, over the last 200 years, have questioned the historical reliability of the New Testament record on other grounds. They have argued that the New Testament is not so much a historical record as a 'faith' document. Its writers, they say, were only secondarily interested in providing reliable information about the real man who lived and died in Palestine. The accounts of Jesus' earthly life have been so coloured by the staggering claim of his Resurrection that the real person has been lost to us.

It is certainly true that the New Testament is the book of the infant Church and that its overwhelming purpose is to call people to faith in Jesus Christ as Son of God and Saviour. But that does not mean that it is not a valid source of historical information. Compiled from the older oral tradition that initially preserved the stories of Jesus, the Gospels vividly portray real incidents and sayings of the man Jesus. The stories, sayings and style are similar to others found in the writings of Jewish teachers of the time. The Gospels breathe the atmosphere of Palestine in the 1st century.

To some extent, this has been confirmed in the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, most likely the ancient remains of the library of the Qumran community which flourished near the Dead Sea in the 1st century. While there is no reference at all to Jesus in the library, the writings reveal something of the thought world of ancient Palestine and as such provide a fascinating insight into the world in which Jesus lived and the Gospels were written.

What kind of person emerges from the pages of the New Testament? This is a complex question, for the Gospels themselves paint different pictures of Jesus and especially of the way he is understood, his person and his mission. For example, in Mark's Gospel, Jesus appears unwilling to reveal his true identity, while in John's Gospel, he speaks openly about it. It is this kind of diversity that has led to a number of different approaches to understanding Jesus' historical identity. Some have argued that he was a Jewish freedom fighter, others that he was a mystical Galilean teacher, still others see him as a prophet of the coming apocalypse. These are attempts to place Jesus of Nazareth into an authentic context that makes historical sense and also makes sense of the New Testament witness to his unique relationship with God.

Much of this research has been known as the *Quest for the Historical Jesus*, following a book originally written by Albert Schweitzer. It has a long history, involving some of the 20th century's most notable theological figures, and it has taken a number of different forms. On the whole, however, modern scholarship affirms that the Gospels reveal an authentic person, who lived and taught, performed miracles and died on a cross. His message of the imminent coming of God's Kingdom was realised through his death and resurrection. The Church that resulted preached Jesus the Christ, and faith in him as the way into that Kingdom. There is a continuity between the man who lived in Palestine and the Christ who reigns in Heaven.

b) Was Jesus God?

This is the central question of our day, the most significant for our understanding of Jesus himself and of our salvation. The Bible witnesses to the unique character of Jesus during his earthly life – to his exceptional spiritual authority, to the forgiveness of sins, his miracles, his especially close relationship with God the Father. It also testifies clearly to his crucifixion and resurrection, seeing them as of eternal significance for the whole of humanity. How has contemporary New Testament scholarship understood Jesus' divinity in the light of the biblical evidence?

c) What is the evidence from Jesus' life?

There have been a number of 20th century answers to that question. There have been those who have declined to see this as a question relating to Jesus of Nazareth at all. One of the foremost among them was Rudolph Bultmann (1884-1976). Bultmann emphasised the importance of the Gospel *message*, which brings salvation. This message – the *kerygma*, or proclamation – challenges people to commit themselves to Christ, the bringer of salvation. It is Christ who saves, as people put their faith in him.

Bultmann therefore answered the challenge of Jesus' divinity by severing the connection between the man Jesus and the Christ who is the object of faith. For him, questions about Jesus the man were meaningless. We simply cannot know anything about him, for the stories in the New Testament were largely the products of the churches that grew up in response to the gospel message. It is the Christ who is present in the *kerygma* who is the one who brings us salvation.

In contrast to Bultmann, Karl Barth (1886-1968) placed great emphasis on the historical Jesus and on the account of him that the Gospels present. Barth's whole theology is built on the person of Jesus. He is the distinctive, God-given revelation who alone brings salvation. The gospel, rooted in history, is what God has given. It is not open to historical enquiry or contemporary speculation: it is God speaking his word, to be accepted or rejected. This severe approach reinforced orthodox teaching: 'Either in Jesus we have to do with God or a creature, and if God, we have to affirm what Nicea affirmed' (*Church Dogmatics*).

The Scottish theologian Donald M. Baillie (1887-1954) attempted to identify how humanity and deity could be found in one true person. His famous phrase was 'a paradox of grace'. For Baillie the incarnation of Jesus is not two 'natures' held in tension with each other. The divinity of Jesus is best understood through the exceptional humility which the Gospels reveal in Jesus' relationship with his Father God. Rather than present his own claims, Jesus is supremely 'God-conscious', so open to God that the Spirit of God totally possesses him: 'The man in whom God was incarnate would claim nothing for himself as a man, but ascribed

all glory to God...The God-Man is the only man who claims nothing for himself, but all for God' (from *God was in Christ*). In this paradoxical way, the glory of Jesus was seen in his humility as he allowed the work of God to be fulfilled through him.

The writer J. I. Packer contends that all major problems of faith find their answer in a right understanding of the Incarnation: "The really staggering Christian claim is that Jesus of Nazareth was God made man – that the second person of the Godhead became "the second man" (*1 Corinthians 15:47*), determining human destiny, the second representative head of the race, and that he took humanity without loss of deity, so that Jesus of Nazareth was as truly and fully divine as he was human' (*Knowing God* 1973). If we understand the incarnation rightly, says Packer, we can appreciate the significance of Jesus' death and the possibility of his resurrection.

d) What is the evidence from his resurrection?

The resurrection of Jesus, as it is recorded in the Gospels, is the greatest challenge of all to scepticism about Jesus' divinity. What are the responses of the 20th century to the challenge of the Resurrection?

According to Bultmann, the Resurrection was not a historical event, but an experiential event in the lives of the disciples who were transformed by their encounter with Christ. In other words, it was something that happened to the disciples and not something that happened to Jesus himself. While he sympathised with Bultmann's approach to the call to faith, Karl Barth disagreed profoundly with him about the historicity of the Resurrection. The Resurrection, said Barth, was a historical event and the empty tomb witnesses to it. We have no right to question it on historical grounds, but to accept it by faith as God intends.

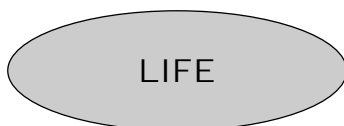
Wolfhart Pannenberg (b. 1928) is one of the most recent scholars to have considered this question. He bases his thinking about the divinity of Jesus on a historical resurrection, though of far greater significance than a mere fact. For Pannenberg, the resurrection of Jesus must be the precursor to the whole purpose of God in history – that is, the resurrection of the dead and the creation of a new heaven and a new earth. Jesus rose from death to demonstrate God's purposes. Therefore Jesus must be, as the Bible maintains, uniquely related to God, divine as well as human.

e) Who, then, is Jesus Christ for me?

Our personal salvation does not depend ultimately on how we understand the New Testament or the relation between Jesus' humanity and his divinity. What we are called to do is to commit ourselves in faith to the risen Christ and to accept the reconciliation he offered through the Cross. With this, most modern theology would agree.

This commitment comes about through an encounter with Christ which is the bedrock of our salvation experience. Christian doctrine traditionally maintains that in that encounter we meet the one who, as Jesus of Nazareth, lived and died, as well as rose again, for us. If Jesus was not a real human being who died a real death, his atonement was of no significance and our salvation is not secure.

In Christ we meet with one who stands with us as the man of Galilee and reigns over us as King of kings.



1. Life-style and ethics

- a) The humanity of Christ has implications for our own humanity, for we are made in the image of God. As humans, we have a potential for the grace of God to fill our lives. In the light of this understanding, how would you understand the promise of Jesus: 'Anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father' (*John 14:12*)?
- b) How can you benefit from the example of Jesus' obedience to God:
 - i. at the beginning of his public ministry (*Matthew 3:13 – 4:11*)?
 - ii. as he faced the Cross (*Mark 14:32-36*)?

2. The mission of the Church

In what ways can Christians celebrate and share God's gift of Jesus:

- a) in a multi-faith society?
- b) in a society where people are strongly influenced by New Age ideas?

3. Personal ministry

- a) In what ways can my personal life and ministry to others reflect the true nature of Christ?
- b) Are there ways in which I can share the celebration of Christian festivals (for example, Easter, Christmas, Pentecost) with my friends and neighbours, so that the significance of Jesus' story becomes clearer to them?



WORSHIP

1. Read the section of chapter four entitled: Jesus Christ our Lord (*Salvation Story* page 39)

Philippians 2:5-11 and Song 177 (SASB) 'Fairest Lord Jesus' would also be helpful.

- a) Offer worship to Jesus Christ as Lord
of your personal life;
of your family and relationships;
of your work and Christian service.
- b) Reflect that in your worship you share in the adoration offered to Jesus by countless Christians from biblical times until now.
- c) Pray for those known to you who have still to acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord of their lives.
- d) Take time to sense the love of God in Jesus Christ surrounding you as you pray. Thank God for Jesus.

2. Using the section of chapter four entitled 'The Incarnation' in *Salvation Story*, focus on a God who has himself lived and experienced life as a human being, and therefore understands you as a human being, yet overcame sin and humanity and is your God and Creator.

This could be extended for use in public worship. With the help of songs from the *Salvation Army Song Book* and other worship supplements, and with worship background provided by musical sections, focus on Jesus Christ as Lord, mediator, redeemer, friend, high priest and the only one who is worthy of worship.

3. Using *Hebrews 4:14-16*, reflect on Christ as high priest, who can be approached with confidence because of our common humanity. Other helpful Scriptures include *Hebrews 5:1-10*, *7:21-28* and *10:19-31*. Other Scriptures reflecting the mediating role of Jesus Christ are *1 Timothy 2:5*; *Hebrews 8:6*; *9:15* and *12:24*.

4. Suggestions for meditation from SASB:

- 56 All hail the power of Jesus' name
- 59 I know thee who thou art
- 61 Jesus, the very thought of thee
- 102 When Christ drew near
- 104 Who is he in yonder stall?

BIBLE STUDIES

Before engaging in discussion, read the appropriate section of the text along with suggested Bible references under the heading indicated.

1. *Jesus the man* (*Salvation Story* pages 36-37)

Compare *Matthew 4:1-11* with *Hebrews 2:10-18* (and/or *Mark 14:32-42* with *Hebrews 5:1-10*)

- a) How does the writer to the Hebrews explain the reality of Jesus' temptations and their significance for our salvation?
- b) In what ways is it helpful for you to know that Jesus suffered temptation as we do?

2. *Jesus, God's Son* (*Salvation Story* pages 37-39)

- a) 'He who has seen me has seen the Father' (*John 14:9*). Discuss this verse in the light of *one* of the given Bible references.
- b) In what ways does the character of Jesus shed light on the nature of God for you?

3. *Jesus Christ our Lord* (*Salvation Story* page 39)

In *John 20:28*, Thomas called Jesus 'My Lord and my God'.

- a) What do you think Thomas had discovered about Jesus to provoke this exclamation?
- b) In what way is Thomas' declaration significant for you?

4. *Salvation Story* (*Salvation Story* pages 40-42)

- a) Do you think the phrase 'Salvation Story' is an apt description of the life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus? In what ways can Christians tell the story of Jesus today so that its meaning is made clear?
- b) Discuss *Acts 1:6-11*. In some Christian traditions the ascension of the Lord Jesus is not greatly emphasized. What do you think this passage in Acts is intended to teach us about God's ultimate purposes for the world?

5. *Our Salvation Story* (*Salvation Story* page 42)

Reflect on *John 3:16*, using the given paragraphs in *Salvation Story*.

- a) '...he gave his one and only Son...' How did Jesus' relationship with God make that gift possible?
- b) '...whoever believes in him...' What is the relationship between belief and obedience?
- c) '...shall not perish but have eternal life'. How does the story of Jesus become our salvation story?

6. *Sermon Series Suggestions*

- a) Create a series around the life and ministry of Jesus, perhaps developing the theme with pictures, poetry, films that relate the story. An occasional series from Christmas to Easter might be appropriate. Suggested titles could include:

Jesus: his birth
Jesus: his baptism and temptations

Jesus: his teaching
Jesus: his healing ministry
Jesus: the Kingdom
Jesus: his suffering
Jesus: his death
Jesus: his resurrection
Jesus: his ascension
Jesus: his return

b) *Salvation Story*, Appendix 5 – The Names and Titles of Jesus – could be used to make an effective series:

Jesus is

- i. Saviour
- ii. Servant
- iii. Son of God

c) *Hebrews 4:14-16* is good sermon material:

- i. that Jesus Christ is the one worthy to be worshipped.
- ii. that there is no one who is not acceptable in his sight.
- iii. that there is the need for approaching God in meekness and repentance.
- iv. that he provides 'grace to help us in time of need'.

SALVATION STORY STUDY GUIDE

CHAPTER FIVE

The Holy Spirit, Lord and giver of life

The doctrine of the Holy Spirit

Related Doctrines

We believe that there are three persons in the Godhead – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, undivided in essence and co-equal in power and glory.

We believe that repentance towards God, faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and regeneration by the Holy Spirit, are necessary to salvation.

N.B. – Before commencing on the following study guide for chapter five of *Salvation Story*, read the chapter in the Handbook in its entirety, including each of the Scripture references.

BELIEF

1. Historical summary

It has always been a difficult task to explain who the Holy Spirit is and at the same time to safeguard both the concrete reality of the Spirit and the unlimited freedom of the Spirit.

In art it has been done in different ways. The Russian icon painter Andrey Rublev's (1370-1430) famous icon of the Trinity shows the triune God as three angels sitting at a table with a cup at the centre. In the icon the figure in the centre (Christ) and the one to the left (the Holy Spirit) look attentively to the person at the right (God the Father). There is an atmosphere of unity and closeness. The robe of the Holy Spirit seems nearly transparent in green – yellow colours. In this way Rublev describes both the concreteness and the limitlessness of the Spirit. This image has been painted again and again in the icons in the following centuries. El Greco (1541-1614) describes the Holy Spirit in his famous painting of Pentecost in a way in which he stresses the effect of the Holy Spirit. The effect is expressed in the faces looking upwards reflecting the glory and other-worldliness. The Holy Spirit himself is painted as a dove.

Through languages we can see the attempt to define the Spirit, and it is interesting to see the gender of the word spirit in different languages. In Latin *spiritus* is masculine as in German *geist* and Russian *dukh*. In Hebrew *ruach* is feminine and in Greek *pneuma* is neuter. The languages show that the Spirit cannot be confined within genders, he breaks this boundary. At the same time the use of different genders in different languages describes the inclusive nature of the Spirit.

Most frequently we describe the Holy Spirit by his effect. Augustine said: 'It is the Spirit therefore who is signified in the text 'God is love'. God the Holy Spirit who proceeds from God is the one who, when given to us, sets us on fire with the love of God and of our neighbour, and is himself love'.

Hans Küng says in *Credo* (1992): 'Spirit means the personal nearness of God to human beings, as little to be separated from God as the sun's rays are to be separated from the sun itself'.

Looking into the grammar of the verbs used in connection with the Spirit in the Bible, it is obvious that the present tense is the dominant tense, signifying the contemporary nature of the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is and has always been contemporary, working creatively in the world, revealing God, illumining people and bringing things to life. This was not always realised at the time and is not always realised today. Sometimes we immediately know when the Spirit is working in and through us, but even so, full realisation will only come when time has passed and we are able to see things in perspective. As the Spirit is invisible, his work is often unknown to us and at times we are taken by surprise when his presence and work are revealed to us and we are able to identify him.

During the first 300 years of Christianity the theology of the Holy Spirit was not at the forefront as theologians struggled with the problem of how to explain the mystery of Christ and how to transmit the Christian gospel to a pagan world. Gregory of Nazianzus (around 334-394) was fully aware of this and gave the following explanation of why it was so and how the focus changed:

The Old Testament preached the Father openly and the Son more obscurely. The New Testament revealed the Son, and hinted at the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Now the Spirit dwells in us, and is revealed more clearly to us. It was not proper to preach the Son openly, while the divinity of the Father had not yet been admitted. Nor was it proper to accept the Holy Spirit before (the divinity of) the Son had been acknowledged....Instead, by gradual advances and...partial ascents, we should move forward and increase in clarity, so that the light of the Trinity should shine.

Even though Gregory expected an 'increase in clarity', there was seldom throughout Church history a focus on the theology of the Holy Spirit in mainstream churches. The focus was there in dissident groups, in the personal experiences of mystics and visionaries, but these encounters did not lead to developing or stressing a theology of the Spirit in the Church as a whole. In the 20th century, however, this changed. The advancement and growth of the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement was followed up by a strong awakening to the person of the Holy Spirit in personal experience as well as in theology. This has been expressed within existing churches as well as in new and indigenous ones. Because of this development a rediscovery of the theology of the Trinity has occurred to secure the wholeness and fullness of the Christian faith.

a) Spirit

The word spirit in Hebrew *ruach* and in Greek *pneuma* has the basic meaning of air in movement as for example, wind, breeze or breath. These basic meanings of the word itself have made possible describing the Spirit in many images, all of them pointing to God's energy let loose.

b) The Old Testament

The image of the wind or the storm used in the Old Testament reflects the experience the people of Israel had with the wind due Israel's geography. The country bordered the Mediterranean on the west, and the great deserts on the east.

When the wind blew from the east, it carried the fine sand of the desert. The east wind could be very powerful developing into a sandstorm and destroying the vegetation on its way. This gave one image of God as the judge, who condemns and destroys human pride (*Psalms 103:15-18, Jeremiah 4:11-12*) and lets kingdoms rise and fall. It also demonstrates the frailty, finitude and mortality of creation in contrast to the immortality of the eternal God.

The grass withers and the flowers fall, when the breath of the Lord blows on them.

The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever (*Isaiah 40:7-8*).

The western wind was different. In the summer it brought coolness and in the winter it brought rain. It was an image that described refreshment, coolness in the heat of the day and water on dry ground, and portrayed God as the one refreshing their spiritual needs.

The image of breath is connected with creation and the giving of life. In *Genesis 2:7* we read that God breathed the breath of life into Adam and he became a living being. *Psalms 33:6* and *104:29-30* mention the Spirit as God's life-giving breath creating the world. In *Genesis 1:2* the Spirit is present at the beginning of creation.

The marvellous story of the vision of the valley with the dry bones in *Ezekiel 37:1-10* reflects the breath of God bringing new life into what is dead.

The verbs which are sometimes used in connection with the work of the Spirit broaden the picture even more. They indicate a substance in a liquid form, for example in *Ezekiel 39:29* and *Joel 3:1* the Spirit is poured out and in *Isaiah 44:3* and *32:15* it is emptied out.

The Spirit is God's power in action shaping creation and giving life (*Job 33:4*): 'For the Spirit of God made me, and the breath of the Almighty gave me life'.

Individuals were filled with the Spirit and were thereby able to reveal God's message to his people through prophecy (*Isaiah 61:1-4*, *Micah 3:8*). By the Spirit, leaders were chosen and equipped for strong and effective leadership. Others were by the same Spirit given wisdom (*Deuteronomy 34:9-12*) and skills for creative work (*Exodus 31:1-11*). The Spirit taught them how to be faithful, righteous and fruitful (*Isaiah 48:16*; *63:10-14*) and he called them to faith, repentance, obedience, praise and prayer (*Psalms 51*).

The combination of 'holy' and 'spirit' is quite rare in the Old Testament as it occurs only in *Isaiah 63:10-11* and *Psalms 51:13*. Even though the phrase is widely used in the New Testament, even there 'Spirit' alone appears more often than Holy Spirit.

c) The New Testament

In the New Testament the Holy Spirit is identified as the Old Testament Spirit of God (*Acts 2:16-21*). Here he is seen, as in the Old Testament, as the one giving life and as the creative power of God. The action of the Holy Spirit is evident in the conception and birth of Jesus and in the resurrection of Jesus the Christ. Here as well as in the Old Testament the Spirit is the one calling forth prophecy (*Luke 4:18-19*; *Acts 2:17*).

The Spirit is linked to the activities of Jesus. This is illustrated by his baptism at the Jordan at the beginning of his ministry (*Mark 1:2-11*) and is evident throughout it.

In the Gospel of *John* the Spirit is distinct as a person. He is the Spirit of truth and the *paraclete*, which means the one who comes alongside (*John 14:15-17*; *15:26-27*; *16:7-11*). Following the death of Jesus, the Spirit will take over the role of Jesus as counsellor, helper, strengthener, supporter and adviser as promised by Jesus. He will reveal the reality of Jesus and unite believers to Christ. He will assure them that they are children of God and lead them to the knowledge of Jesus and to the fellowship with the Father and the Son. After his resurrection Jesus, filled with the Spirit, gives the Spirit to the disciples (*John 20:19-23*). Here the gift of the Spirit is significantly linked to the authority to forgive sins.

Luke could be called the theologian of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is portrayed as *the agent* throughout the Gospel of *Luke* and the Acts of the Apostles. In the Gospel it is very evident that the ministry of Jesus is marked by the power of the Holy Spirit (*Luke 3:22*; *4:1-2*). Through Jesus' life, death and resurrection, the presence of the Spirit was noticed by the disciples, the followers, the disadvantaged, and even some of the scribes and other authorities. In the Acts of the Apostles we see that the Spirit empowers the disciples and the new Christians for service and mission. He gives them courage and the ability to witness, prompts them to missionary activity and creates community. There is a strong link between receiving the Spirit and being a witness. The two cannot be separated (*Acts 1:8*). In the Acts of the Apostles the activity of the Spirit is so much in focus that the book could be called the Acts of the Holy Spirit.

The letters of Paul stress that Christians live in the Spirit and that the reception of the Spirit is a result of their obedient faith. The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of holiness (*Romans 1:4*). Life in the Spirit is a life of fellowship. God grants the Spirit and works miracles through him. The Spirit prays effectively in and for believers, and enables a close and intimate fellowship with God (*Romans 8:1-17*). The gift of the Holy Spirit is related to the goal of sanctification. This is particularly stressed in *1 Thessalonians 4 and 5*, and reflected in our doctrines. There is an association of the Spirit and mission, the Spirit and ethics and the Spirit and prophecy (*1 Corinthians 12 and 13*).

d) Early Belief

The following basic sayings concerning the Holy Spirit reflect the *early belief and experience* of the New Testament church:

'God has given us the Spirit' is stated in *Acts (5:32; 15:8)*, in the Pauline letters (*Romans 5:5; 11:8; 2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:8; 2 Timothy 1:7*) and in John's letters (*1 John 3:24; 4:13*).

'You have received the Spirit' is stated in John (2:27; 20:22), in Acts (2:33,38; 8:15,17,19; 10:47; 19:2), and in the Pauline letters (*Romans 8:15; 1 Corinthians 2:12; 2 Corinthians 11:4; Galatians 3:2*).

'The Spirit of God dwells within you' is stated in the Pauline letters (*1 Corinthians 3:16; Romans 8:9,11; Ephesians 2:21; 1 Peter 2:5*).

The equality of the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son is highlighted in *Matthew 28:19* and in *1 Corinthians 12:4-6*: 'There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works in all men'.

All this points to the importance in New Testament time of what was later to be formulated in the Nicene Creed at the Council of Constantinople in 381: that the Holy Spirit is 'Lord and giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, and is worshipped and glorified with the Father and the Son'.

2. The importance of the doctrine to Christian Faith

It is vital for Christian faith to focus upon the Holy Spirit because the Spirit revives spiritual life, church fellowship and renews structures. By his contemporary nature he points to a contemporary agenda for all of life including what we normally describe as secular. This focus helps us keep in mind that the Spirit blows wherever he chooses and that he is not confined to church borders or national boundaries. By the Spirit we can often identify his presence in contemporary art, music, literature, theatre, and even on the political scene.

The doctrine points to the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit which brings people to salvation and transforms a nominal, slumbering faith into a living faith for individuals as well as for larger groups.

a) Fellowship

The New Testament word for fellowship *koinonia* does not mean a fellowship which occurs just by gathering around some goal or mission. It means a fellowship which occurs when you are part of something or have a share of something. This something is the love of God, the grace of Jesus Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. This fellowship is reflected in Paul's use of the expressions being '*in Christ*' or '*in the Holy Spirit*'.

The words from *2 Corinthians 13:14* describe the fellowship: 'May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all'. The blessing shows the characteristics of the persons of the Godhead and here the Holy Spirit is characterised by fellowship. It is very clear from the Pauline letters that the Spirit does not serve self interests, but the fellowship.

It is in this fellowship created by the Holy Spirit that God is made real to us. Here the Spirit directs and inspires our prayers and worship as well as the development of our spirituality.

Within the framework of the fellowship there is diversity. In this diversity the Holy Spirit makes it possible to acknowledge something positive and creative. In fact this overwhelming variety itself is a gift from the Holy Spirit (*1 Corinthians:12*). This is not the cause of division, but a richness in which we rejoice.

b) Only one Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is known by those who pray for his coming. The Holy Spirit lives in those who long for a liberation from spirits which keep the world in bondage. There are spirits of fear, intimidation, fascination which can lead to obsession, addiction, seeking power and control over others, envy and many more (*Salvation Story* appendix 6).

There are many spirits, but only one Holy Spirit. We can be 'spiritual' without the Holy Spirit.

We can call things spiritual, and they may well be, but not spiritual within the sphere of God the Holy Spirit, as not every spiritual experience is from the Holy Spirit.

There is one sign which always must be there to be the true sign of God the Holy Spirit. It is the sign or signature of Christ: he who is amongst us as the one who serves (*Luke 22:27*). We are called to be his

disciples, therefore we must live in this spirit of loving service. To be filled with the Holy Spirit is to do that – to be holy is to live this Christ life.

If we forget this sign, or signature, we may have our own seemingly 'spiritual' church, but not the church of Christ's Holy Spirit. However great the gifts or the splendour of worship, they cannot replace the deep involvement with lost mankind. The Holy Spirit comes from the same spring as the suffering love that seeks the lost.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God our Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit must be present so that our spirituality will not be based on other spirits rather than God the Holy Spirit.

c) Inspiration of the Holy Spirit

- i. It is by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that Christian life is entered, lived, learned and taught and the vitality of the fellowship is experienced.
- ii. We believe that the Bible itself is inspired by God and that the Biblical writers worked and wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.
- iii. By that same inspiration the Bible is opened for us so that we comprehend its message and it becomes personal and contemporary.

3. Issues for Salvationists

As *mission* is the very essence of Salvationism, the connection between the Holy Spirit and mission and the Spirit's empowerment for this must always be affirmed and lived out. We are a movement of the Spirit and a strong belief in the work of the Holy Spirit keeps our *vision* clear. It is most important to realise that the Spirit is already working in people and in the world and that he will open our eyes to see when, where and with whom. This eases the burden of commitment to mission and service because we are not doing these on our own. We are given ability to witness and strength for the task by the Spirit as the contemporary Spirit empowers us to give a contemporary witness.

The early Christians had a strong sense of a *holistic gospel*. Because of the belief in the resurrection and the experience of the Holy Spirit they a) shared meals and possessions and b) worshipped together. Their example showed a community which included the material as well as the spiritual, neither at the expense of the other. This community was most effective in mission. In a similar way, the Founders and first Salvationists formed the framework for Salvationist life and faith, and the experience of the Holy Spirit led them to be alert to this same wholeness. Our history has shown that when the spiritual and material are kept together and expressed in practice, our mission has been most effective.

The Holy Spirit, called by Paul the *Spirit of holiness*, is the agent of our sanctification. Attentiveness to the Holy Spirit rather than our own effort leads us to holiness.

4. Essential aspects of the doctrine

The Holy Spirit as Lord and giver of life makes the risen Christ real to us. Like a spring the Spirit feeds the new life that flows out from Christ's resurrection from the dead. The Spirit not only keeps our hope of resurrection alive, he is bound up with that hope. Life in the Spirit is a fellowship of life with the crucified and risen Lord, because the Holy Spirit and the reality of the resurrection belong together. To trust the resurrection is to receive the Holy Spirit, for only the Holy Spirit can open this dimension of God and of his future in our lives and make it a present reality. To believe in the resurrection is to believe that God has conquered death and that he by his Spirit is active in this world and in our lives (*John 7:37-39; Acts 2:29-39*).

It is the Spirit who convicts us, regenerates, sanctifies and empowers us for ministry when we believe in Christ as Saviour and Lord.

5. Discussion Questions / Exercises

- a) Identify the work of the Holy Spirit in the following and give some indication of how he is at work:

in your personal life;
in the life of your corps;
in the life of your community;
in the life of your country;
and on the world stage.

- b) Do you agree that to believe and to trust in the resurrection of Jesus is to receive the Holy Spirit? Why do you think these are so closely linked? Would it be true to say that to deny the resurrection of Jesus is to deny the Holy Spirit?
- c) What do we mean when we say that the Holy Spirit is contemporary?

6. *Further discussion*

a) **The Church Fathers and the debate concerning the Holy Spirit**

Theological thinking about the Holy Spirit was, as mentioned before, not prominent during the first 300 hundred years. For example, Irenaeus (around 130-200) tried to explain the Trinity, and spoke about the image of God's word and wisdom (Christ and the Holy Spirit) as the *two hands of God*. Another time he characterised the Holy Spirit in this way: '...through whom the prophets prophesied, and our forebears learned of God and the righteous were led in the paths of justice.'

In the 4th century the doctrine of the Holy Spirit was given a more central place on the theological agenda. The divinity of the Holy Spirit was the basic question. Here Gregory of Nazianzus stressed that Scripture applied all the titles of God to the Spirit. Of particular importance was the use of the word *holy* in connection with the Spirit. He argued that this divine holiness did not come from a source outside the Spirit, but was the consequence of the nature of the Spirit himself. The Spirit was to be seen as the one who sanctifies, rather than the one who requires sanctification.

Basil of Caesarea (329-379) stated that the Holy Spirit performed functions which were specific to God and therefore the Holy Spirit shared in the divine nature. He was the one who sanctified:

All who are in need of sanctification turn to the Spirit; all those seek him who live by virtue, for his breath refreshes them and comes to their aid in the pursuit of their natural and proper end. Capable of perfecting others, the Spirit himself lacks nothing. He is not a being who needs to restore his strength, but himself supplies life....Souls in which the Spirit dwells, illuminated by the Spirit, themselves become spiritual and send forth their grace to others.

Augustine (354-430) became a Christian partly through the influence of Caius Marius Victorinus and one of his few hymns inspired Augustine in his later writings on the Holy Spirit by describing the Spirit as a bond:

Help us, Holy Spirit, the bond of Father and Son,
When you rest, you are the Father; when you proceed, the Son;
In binding all in one, you are the Holy Spirit.

Augustine contributed significantly to the theology of the Holy Spirit by his treatise *On the Trinity*. In presenting the Holy Spirit he describes the Spirit as the Spirit of both Father and Son binding them together in a bond of love.

His argument for an identification of the Holy Spirit and love is based on *1 John chapter 4* and he ends his line of argument by stating that the Holy Spirit is the God who is love.

As Augustine sees the Spirit as the bond of unity between Father and Son, so he sees him as the bond of unity between God and the believer. The Spirit unites believers both to God and to other believers. The same Spirit who unites the Father and the Son in the Godhead also unites believers in the unity of the Church.

Cyril of Alexandria from the fifth century saw the Spirit as the one guaranteeing unity between believers:

All of us who have received the one and the same Spirit, that is, the Holy Spirit, are in a sense merged together with one another and with God. For if Christ, together with the Spirit of the Father and himself, comes to dwell in each of us, even though there are many of us, then it follows that the Spirit is still one and undivided. He binds together the spirit of each and every one of us... and makes us all appear as one in him.

b) The Holy Spirit and the Church

In the Classical Creeds, belief in the Holy Spirit is stated and continues with belief in the Church. This illustrates that the Church cannot be separated from the Spirit; they belong together. Through Church history this has been taken to mean that the Church and the Holy Spirit are identical or that the Spirit is bound to the Church and cannot be found outside the borders of the Church. This is not what we believe. But we believe that the Church cannot be the true Church without the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. When the Church has gone astray, it has been the Holy Spirit who has renewed and revived it.

This dependence upon the Holy Spirit and acknowledgement of the necessity of the Holy Spirit is very obvious in the liturgy of the Orthodox Church. There is always a prayer calling for the presence of the Holy Spirit:

O heavenly King,
Comforter,
the Spirit of truth,
present in all places and filling all things;
treasury of good things and giver of life,
come and dwell in us
and purify us from every stain,
and of your goodness save our souls.
(Quoted from *Come, Holy Spirit* by George Lemopoulos,
Ecumenical Review, Vol. 41, No.3, July 1989 p. 461.)

It is the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church that creates genuine unity, the unity Jesus asked for in his prayer before his arrest:

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me (*John 17:20-21*).

This prayer has been a constant challenge for the Church, for all Christian fellowship, because we fall short of it and therefore the very essence of the fellowship is hurt by strife and division. It is not a comfort but it seems that unity always has been difficult to achieve.

The apostles struggled to keep the unity and to build bridges of acceptance and understanding. An example is Paul's great effort with the collection for the Jerusalem church (*Romans 15:25-32*). He wanted the Gentile churches to show oneness in sharing with the poverty-stricken church in Jerusalem. It should be a gift of love, of unity, of grace freely given. Perhaps the most important issue was that if the Jerusalem church accepted the offering it would signify that Paul and his Gentile churches were accepted as genuine parts of the Christian Church. This seems to have happened and unity was kept, expressing itself as unity in diversity.

Church history is more a history of division than of unity and the marks are painfully visible amongst Christians. A growing consciousness of the sinfulness of this condition led to the inauguration of the Ecumenical Movement in the 20th century. This has come through division and strife, but has nevertheless kept a dynamic dialogue alive between different denominations worldwide. It has led to a growing understanding and acceptance of Christian traditions which are alien to each other.

The 20th century could be called the century of the Holy Spirit as the focus in Christian experience and in theology has been on the Holy Spirit. One of the results of this has been different movements bridging the gaps of understanding amongst Christians and giving a deeper fellowship across church boundaries. A continuation of this search for unity in diversity will most probably be one of the marks of the next century.

Whenever unity is realised it is a glimpse of the coming Kingdom. The full unity or oneness with which we are challenged in the prayer of Jesus is an eschatological concept which belongs to the Kingdom of God. This unity is integral to our Christian hope. It will only be fully realised when the Kingdom breaks through in all its fullness.

LIFE

1. *Lifestyle and ethics*

A corps is a place where you meet and where by the Holy Spirit you learn to appreciate a diversity of gifts and attitudes.

- a) How does the spiritual fellowship of your corps influence your daily life?
- b) How does your understanding of the Holy Spirit influence your attitude towards people of different cultures, backgrounds, ages and outlooks?
- c) Do you treasure fellowship across such barriers and do you see a value in diversity?
- d) How do you build relationships with them?

2. *Mission of the Church*

A church can be very 'spiritual' without being grounded in God the Holy Spirit who gives compassion. How can we make sure that it is the Holy Spirit who is the agent of fellowship and spirituality?

Read the section *A mission empowered*, page 55 in *Salvation Story*. How will the way you live the story and tell the story show that it is the Holy Spirit who is directing you and feeding your spiritual life?

3. *Personal Ministry*

- a) How is the assurance that the Holy Spirit intercedes for me and gives voice to my deepest longings and needs reflected in my prayer life? How does it free me to focus on intercession? How does that assurance encourage me to witness?
- b) Does the belief that the Holy Spirit is at work in the world make me alert to what happens around me? Give examples.

WORSHIP

Ideas for personal and corporate worship:

1. Read the section *The Holy Spirit is the giver of life*, pages 52-54 in *Salvation Story*, and apply this to the reality of your personal life or your corps life. Listen to the call to repentance and allow the Spirit to renew your faith, your attitudes and your relationships with God and other people.

2. Find songs and choruses that reflect the mystery, the power and the freedom of the Spirit. Examples from the SASB could be:

- 203 Thou Christ of burning, cleansing flame
- 200 Our blest redeemer, ere he breathed
- 198 O Holy Ghost, on thee we wait
- 191 Come, thou everlasting Spirit
- 211 Descend, O Holy Spirit, thou

3. Bible readings

Read the amazing vision of *Ezekiel 37:1-14* and reflect upon it. Try to visualise the dryness of the bones and the new life coming into them. Apply the story to your own life in its totality (work, family life, corps fellowship, spiritual life).

4. Try to obtain a tape or prepare one yourself which has sounds of a storm, wind and a gentle breeze, of gentle and good rain, of a burning fire and listen to these sounds while you reflect on the Holy Spirit as revealed in Scripture.

5. Choose a picture, a photo, a painting or a poster which reflects or illustrates new life coming into being and use this for meditation on the life-giving Spirit.

6. Prayers

- a) Be silent and rest in the assurance that the Spirit intercedes for you.
- b) Give voice to your prayers in song.
- c) Rejoice in the freedom of the Spirit.

7. Make use of lectionaries, creeds, and affirmations of faith (see 'Examples of Contemporary Salvationist Creeds' at the end of the Study Guide).

8. Write in your own words your belief in the Holy Spirit.



BIBLE STUDIES

Work through the major sections of the chapter and read the Bible references connected to the section. What do these Scriptures teach us?

1. *The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ*

John 16:12-15. Can you relate this promise to your personal experience? Which truth is referred to here? What is the spirit of truth? What is truth in this connection?

2. *The Holy Spirit is Lord*

Psalms 139:1-12. Discuss the role of the Spirit here. Does the message of this Psalm have an influence on your life and choices? Does this Psalm bless you or would you rather not read it?

3. *The Holy Spirit is free and powerful*

John 3:1-8. Try to retell this story with images and a language people can relate to today. What does the description of the Spirit mean?

4. *The Holy Spirit is the giver of life*

Psalms 104:29-30. Relate this text to the accounts of creation in Genesis 1 and 2. Does it shed new light on these stories?

1 Corinthians 2:9-16. What does it mean to be spiritually alive? Are the depths of God that are revealed to us very mysterious or far away from ordinary life?

1 John 4:1-6. Discuss how to test what is from God. How would you apply this to your corps or group in the corps?

Romans 8:26-27. Discuss the intercession of the Spirit. Try to realise what it means. How do you think these verses apply to the way you approach the corporate prayer life of your corps?

5. A mission empowered

Acts 1 and 2. Discuss the return of the disciples to Jerusalem and their actions there. What did their preparation consist of? What had the Spirit prepared for them? What was the result? How did it affect the life of Christians?

6. Sermon series suggestions

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ (*Salvation Story* page 51) *John 14:16-18.*

The Holy Spirit is Lord (*Salvation Story* page 51) *Psalms 139:1-12.*

The Holy Spirit is free and powerful (*Salvation Story* page 52) *John 3:1-8.*

The Holy Spirit is the giver of life (*Salvation Story* page 52-55) *Romans 8:18-25.*

SALVATION STORY STUDY GUIDE

CHAPTER SIX

Distorted image

The doctrine of humanity

Related doctrine

We believe that our first parents were created in a state of innocence, but by their disobedience they lost their purity and happiness, and in consequence of their fall all men have become sinners, totally depraved, and as such are justly exposed to the wrath of God.

N.B. – Before commencing on the following study guide for chapter six of *Salvation Story*, read the chapter in the Handbook in its entirety, including each of the Scripture references.

BELIEF

1. *The universal reality of sin*

The dying Catherine Booth, concerned about the future integrity and usefulness of The Salvation Army, once asked her daughter: ‘Katie, why is it that God can’t keep a thing pure for more than a generation?’ (*God’s Soldier, General William Booth*, St John Ervine, (1935) page 841) With this question, the Army Mother reflected upon the universal human experience of corruption. We fail to fulfill even our own modest goals of right conduct. We fall short, not only of God’s glory (*Romans 3:23*), but also of our own finest intentions to be and do good.

This consciousness of human inadequacy as moral beings has concerned individuals and societies since the dawn of history. People have sensed that there should be harmony between themselves and their environment. Any obvious disharmony between themselves and creation generally has been understood as expressing disharmony with the Creator himself. Consequently, religions have sought by various expedients, usually of sacrificial appeasement, to bridge the gap between human failure and ideal living. Strategies, ceremonial or otherwise, have been adopted to restore a life-enhancing relationship between people and their environment, by reconciling sinners to a righteous Creator-God.

Our failure to live creatively and responsibly has been evidenced in a variety of ways. Individuals have failed to live at peace with their own kin, nor have they managed to harmonise their own inner drives for creative and responsible living. Societies have failed to manage their affairs without the weak-willed impotence of the many and the arrogant dominance of the few. Not only have such failures to live by standards of truth and love brought direct and immediate disastrous consequences, but also, and even worse, evil has become part of the very structures of individual lives or the life of society in self-perpetuating corruption. Consequently, we find ourselves burdened by personal guilt and handicapped by corrupt institutions.

From such a moral and ethical barrier, with its inherent as well as externally structured evil, humanity tries in vain to break its own shackles. The humanist writer, Arthur Koestler (*The Ghost in the Machine*), wrestling with this problem of man’s ethical impotence, saw no hope of self-reformation. In despair he took his own life.

The Bible, however, is more optimistic. Hope is seen in the Creator’s own redemptive action. In Christ a saviour is both promised and realised. Some theories of humanity fail or refuse to recognise the problem. On the other hand, Scripture fully understands the yawning chasm between our intended nature and its flawed reality. We are

made in the image of God and we are intended to reflect his glory both in our individual lives and in the corporate structure we establish. Yet this we fail to do. Because of this the Bible does more than show us our failure to be what God intended, it sees our need of a saviour, while it continually proclaims the provision and possibility of our redemption.

The Genesis account (*Chapters 1-3*), which wrestles with the human dilemma, already looks forward to a way out, because it teaches that the alienation between the Creator, his creation and his creature, is not total. (See *Genesis 3:15,21*.)

a) Old Testament background

In the covenant between God and Abraham (*Genesis 12:1-3*) the Creator promises better things, and himself initiates the redemptive sacrifice (*Genesis 22:13*). The development of this covenant with the people of Israel, inaugurated by the Passover, includes the divinely instituted rituals whereby the sins of the nation can be 'purged' and the well-being of the people established despite their continual waywardness. The relationship between God and his covenant people is continually renewed.

Later, Israel's prophets realise that suffering, especially innocent suffering consequent on the sin of others, in some way deals with the alienation between God and his people. (See *Isaiah 53*.) At the same time, both political and natural disasters are firmly identified with the nation's failure to live by God's will and laws (*Isaiah 9:8-21; Joel 2:1-14*). The Lord himself not only judges and punishes this sin, but also he is the redeemer who will re-enable right living (*Zephaniah 3:1-13*). Moral failure always begins with a rejection of God's sovereignty and ends in oppression by corrupt, self-seeking hierarchies or powerful elites.

b) New Testament background

With the New Testament, the Saviour is revealed in Jesus. 'God is in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself' (*2 Corinthians 5:19*). Jesus not only teaches and lives the perfect human life but also, through the gift of himself in love upon the Cross, rekindles the desire for the renewal of God's image in us. When Christ's resurrection and ascension confirm the saving power of his life, that same newness of life is realised afresh in those who put their confidence in him as the Holy Spirit enables. Paul sees that the whole creation will be revitalised in consequence (*Romans 8:18-25*). Creation itself is made new in the vision of God's Kingdom come (*Revelation 21:1-4*), thus completing the mighty purpose of God and answering the deep need we have of salvation.

c) Original sin

This need for salvation is complex. The doctrine of original sin addresses this problem in a meaningful way. However, any teaching about sin needs to take account of:

- i. our experience of personal moral failure;
- ii. our observation that bad consequences arise from ethical failure;
- iii. the assumption that there is 'right' behaviour which promotes well-being (Right behaviour can be determined by our God-given conscience, or externally by family, tribe or nation and especially by the 'professional' guardians of morals – rulers or religious leaders and in certain societies by a media-promoted culture.);
- iv. an overly simplistic doctrine complicated by the developing revelation of the biblical understanding of sin which does not alter.

Today the Church is still debating the question of original sin. In his Gresham lecture, given in November 1998, Professor Richard Holloway quoted from *Romans 5:12-19*. He then stated:

It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of that passage in the formation of the Christian theological tradition and its effect on human self-understanding....Paul takes it for granted that his readers will know the story of Adam and Eve from the Book of Genesis. Using that ancient narrative as a foundation or premise, he builds up his theological system. First of all, he suggests that human death is the direct consequence of the sin of Adam. He then goes on to suggest that the primordial disobedience of Adam passed guilt on to us like some kind of metaphysical virus.

Holloway then describes some aspects of the way the tradition developed, including the way

Jesus Christ becomes the solution, the cure, to the problem created for the human race by the original disobedience of Adam and Eve, and the punishment of death that it brought upon humanity. Once you accept the originating assumption, the premise on which the system is based, it works with captivating simplicity.

Then he questions:

But what happens when you question the premise, the originating assumption, on which the whole system is built? What happens to a tradition when you no longer believe the claim on which it is built?

Holloway faces the current dilemma all evangelists face. The original assumption is no longer generally believed – and that includes people inside the Church as well as those outside.

In the lecture quoted, Richard Holloway arrives at the same position as our doctrine but on another premise. He concludes:

We are always, in New Testament language, sinners in need of forgiveness and grace.

The question of original sin remains a live, contemporary issue. It is not only a topic for scholarly debate but a vital matter for every individual.

Historically the question was most hotly debated between Augustine, Bishop of Hippo in Roman North Africa (354-430 AD), and the British Christian holiness teacher Pelagius, who died in 420 after being condemned for heresy two years before at a council of bishops convened in Carthage.

Pelagius taught that God has given us the gift of free will so that all of us are morally responsible before God for choices we make. He wrote: 'When God created the world he was acting freely; no other force compelled God to create the world. Thus by creating human beings in his image, he had to give them freedom. A person who could only do good and never do evil would be in chains; a person who can choose good or evil shares the freedom of God'.

Augustine followed orthodox teaching which had been developed from *Romans 5:12-21* and argued that we are no longer capable of choosing good. Of his experience when he lay sick in Rome (383) he wrote in his *Confessions* Book V, ix, that he was dying: 'bearing all the evils I had committed against you (God), against myself, and against others – sins both numerous and serious, in addition to the chain of original sin by which "in Adam we die" (*1 Corinthians 15:22*). You had not yet forgiven me in Christ for any of them, nor had he by his cross delivered me from the hostile disposition towards you which I had contracted by my sins'.

That experience of transforming grace was to be Augustine's at Milan in July 386 when he was delivered from his past sins and enabled to live a chaste life. Later he was to return to his native Africa and be made bishop of the town of Hippo.

The controversy between Pelagius and Augustine hinged on the interpretation both placed on the account of the Fall in Genesis. Pelagius wrote (to Demetrius): 'When Adam and Eve ate from the tree of knowledge they were exercising their freedom of choice; and as a consequence of the choice they made, they were no longer able to live in Eden....Before eating the fruit they did not know the difference between good and evil; thus they did not possess the knowledge which enables human beings to exercise freedom of choice. By eating the fruit they acquired this knowledge, and from that moment onwards they were free. Thus the story of their banishment from Eden is in truth the story of how the human race gained its freedom by eating fruit from the tree of knowledge. Adam and Eve became mature human beings, responsible to God for their actions'.

The pity of the controversy was that both had valuable insights to contribute: Pelagius with his emphasis on freedom and responsibility, and Augustine with his understanding of the variety of the limitations on that freedom of choice. Augustine had personally experienced those limitations. These included the limitations of the past of the human race, peer-group pressures and our indecisive will. (Peer-group pressures: as a youth Augustine stole pears: 'all done for a giggle' when 'had I been alone, it would have given me absolutely no pleasure' (*Confessions*,

Book II ix). Our indecisive will: 'the willing is not whole-hearted....We are dealing with a morbid condition of the mind which, when it is lifted up by truth, does not unreservedly rise to it but is weighed down by our past.' Augustine was conscious of being 'chained to Adam by nature, by habit' (*Confessions*, Book VIII ix).

Pelagius, understandably, did not allow for the genetic or cultural (including family, race, etc.) transmission of wrong strategies for moral living. Augustine did not allow sufficiently for personal autonomy or free will, assuming an inevitable powerlessness in the individual.

The Church has generally followed Augustine's position as far as its official teaching is concerned. In practice it has accommodated the opposite Pelagian view to some considerable degree, an accommodation that can be seen in Wesleyan theology (see Section 6). This whole question is ripe for a new appraisal and clarification. This is especially important given the widespread refusal to recognise the problem of human moral failure.

The Church needs to secure recognition of sin – original sin – not only by rehearsing its doctrine in all its complexity, however sound and Scripturally grounded this may be, but also by pointing out the realities of the human moral situation. The Church needs also to recognise that its doctrine is no longer generally accepted. Therefore we need to reaffirm our utter need of grace, for we are both wholly responsible for the use of our God-given free will and at the same time entirely inhibited from exercising it apart from God's grace.

2. The importance of the doctrine for Christian faith

The doctrine's importance lies in its dynamic hope. This hope, founded on God's initiatives, does not trivialise the question of our ethical inadequacy or failure.

Central to the gospel is God's saving act in Christ. Realising the full splendour of the Cross depends upon a recognition of the overwhelming need we have for a saviour.

An adequate understanding of our sinful condition safeguards the truth that our own need of grace is basic. The salvation offered in Christ does not merely suffice to redeem those with obvious needs for deliverance, such as those with addictive problems. It is essential to us all, both individually and corporately in the way our societies are structured. The welfare of civilisation depends upon our realisation of our need and subsequent receipt of God's redeeming grace in our lives.

In addition, the way in which Christ perfectly restores in us God's image, provides us with a model for ourselves. As our saviour, he makes this possible for us.

3. The essentials of the doctrine

It is essential to establish that God intended us to be his children and stewards on earth. It is from this ideal image, in his likeness, that we have fallen. It is the aim of his redemptive plan to restore to us this untarnished state.

It is equally essential to recognise our failure to be good and do good. In so recognising this we identify the evil in ourselves, confessing our sinful nature as well as our sinful deeds.

It is essential that the doctrine focuses on the reality of evil, and the need for God's initiative to deal with it both individually and culturally. We do well to avoid speculating over the origin of evil or off-loading responsibility onto others, either human or demonic. We recognise that: 'The role of Satan indicates the pervasiveness and power of evil in our world, though it does not absolve us from our responsibility for sin' (*Salvation Story* page 61). As *Genesis 3* teaches, excuses, denials and shifting responsibility for sin are dishonest and finally futile.

Above all, a clear-eyed realisation of the problem of evil will lead us to discover hope in a redeeming God.

4. Issues for Salvationists

The message of salvation, which is the joyous proclamation of the Army, presupposes the need for God's redeeming work.

It is not easy, in a climate of confused ethical thinking, to offer a remedy for the world's ills when they are explained away, denied, or alternately accepted as being in the immutable nature of things. Salvationists need to

be clear about the responsibility of all people for the ethical integrity of their lives, their accountability for the same to God, to creation generally and to their fellows.

It is possible to awaken people to the ills of the world caused by wrong living and to indicate the worthwhile remedy that is offered in Christ.

5. Discussion questions

- a) In the section 'Creation and fall: the biblical witness' (*Salvation Story* page 59), the five points indicate God's intention and our failure to fulfil it. Identify reasons for hope in this teaching. Do you have any areas of concern?
- b) Consider the question of the origin of sin and discuss the role of human free will and responsibility.
- c) Regarding the nature of sin, which of the definitions in this section are most helpful to you personally? Which would you use to convince enquirers of their need of salvation (*Salvation Story* pages 61-63)?
- d) How does our understanding of ourselves square with the doctrines of 'original sin' and 'depravity' (*Romans 7:14 – 8:2*)?
- e) Do you recognise the sense of alienation which is a consequence of our sinful nature and actions? In what ways have you experienced this? (See *Salvation Story* page 64.)
- f) Do you understand the wrath of God as the full realisation of the separation from him that sin inevitably involves?

6. Further discussion

a) A pessimism about human nature

John Wesley has been criticised for not fully acknowledging a pessimism about human nature in some of his teachings on holiness, not being sufficiently realistic in admitting the tendency of human nature for failure. But certainly in his teaching on original sin and its consequence in what the Salvation Army's fifth doctrine describes as 'total depravity', he is clear that human nature, unaided by God, is

wretched, and poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked....He has a deep sense of the loathsome leprosy of sin, which he brought with him from his mother's womb, which over-spreads his whole soul, and totally corrupts every power and faculty thereof. (Wesley)

The common experience of humanity is that sin is at the centre of one's being, and that it affects the total make-up of a person – body, mind and spirit. This does not mean that humankind is completely evil and incapable of any response to good. The depravity of the sinner is however 'total' in the sense that every part of the being is affected by the corruption of sin. Wesley spoke of this as 'a three-fold cord against Heaven, not easily broken, a blind mind, a perverse will, disordered affections'.

b) An optimism about prevenient grace

The question naturally arises as to how that cord might be broken. John Wesley's response to such a question included a distinctively optimistic understanding of the workings of God's grace *before* one is born again, that which theologians term 'prevenient' grace.

He could not agree with the pessimistic view he found in Augustine and Calvin – that fallen man is nothing but evil desire, that only the elect can be saved, that they are saved by God's irresistible grace, and that grace for salvation is available to them alone. Neither could he agree with the opposite, unrealistically optimistic Pelagian view of human nature, that humankind is born with a *natural* capacity for choosing good or evil.

Wesley held that because of their fallen nature, humans are powerless to choose good or evil solely on their own. However, all humans benefit from God's prevenient grace. The term 'prevenient' comes from the

Latin, 'pre'- before, 'venient' – coming to. Thus, grace available before coming to Christ. Through this grace humans are enabled to choose good, and ultimately by faith to accept God's saving grace.

Allowing that all the souls of men are dead in sin by nature, this excuses no one, seeing there is no man, unless he has quenched the Spirit, that is wholly void of the grace of God. No man living is entirely destitute of what is vulgarly called natural conscience. But this is not natural. It is more properly termed preventing grace....Every one has some measure of light, some faint glimmering ray, which, sooner or later, more or less, enlightens every man that cometh into the world. (Wesley)

Salvation by grace through faith begins then with preventing or prevenient or enabling grace, grace which can be resisted by free will, but if accepted, becomes

...the first wish to please God, the first dawn of light concerning his will, and the first slight transient conviction of having sinned against him. All these imply some tendency toward life; some degree of salvation; the beginning of a deliverance from a blind, unfeeling heart, quite insensible of God and the things of God. (Wesley)

We ought to have no illusions about human nature. We must take into account its potential for failure. But such realistic pessimism can be transformed by the optimism of grace, that grace of God which provides a way out of sin and its consequences, that grace which points to the possibility of people being changed.

Colin Williams suggests that in bringing together his doctrines of original sin and prevenient grace, Wesley combines what Gordon Rupp calls a 'pessimism of nature' with an 'optimism of grace' (*John Wesley's Theology Today*).



LIFE

1. Lifestyle and ethics

- a) How can I admit to my own need of salvation in a positive way? Do I need to recognise that both my inherent and actual sin can be dealt with creatively by God?
- b) Do I share responsibilities for evil structures in society? How can I work to eradicate/transform them?

2. Mission of the Church

- a) How can the Church best arouse people to their plight as sinners?
- b) Some humanists teach that both individuals and society generally can be improved or perfected solely by education and laws which eradicate poverty and discrimination. How can the Church best show how this is insufficient to deal with fallen human nature?
- c) Do you agree that a doctrine of original sin should take into account the way that poor environments and heredity affect our ability to live in a right way that respects others and brings glory to God? Why, or why not?

3. Personal ministry

- a) How can an increase in my self-awareness, ownership of my faults, help me to relate positively to Jesus Christ?
- b) How can I more perfectly look to Jesus as my righteousness? How can this enhance my witness (*Isaiah 64:6; 1 Corinthians 1:30*)?

WORSHIP

1. *In sequence meditate on the following:*

- a) re-read the sections on 'Created in the image of God' and 'Salvation through the grace of God' then;
- b) reflect on what God can accomplish in you both now and throughout eternity;
- c) consider your personal worth as God designed you and redeems you to live for his glory;
- d) engage in self-examination and confession to God as a means of grace. Do it now in worship.

2. *Suggestions for meditation*

a) Scripture

Genesis 45:3-11

Psalm 51:1-17

Hosea 11:1-11

John 16:5-11

Romans 3:9-28

Colossians 1:9-14.

b) SASB

824 All have need of God's salvation

885 O soul, consider and be wise

893 Sins of years are all numbered

c) Poetry

Paradise Lost John Milton

The Ballad of Reading Gaol – Oscar Wilde

The Touch of a Master's Hand - Myra Brooks Welch

Sinners, turn; why will ye die? – Charles Wesley

Of Him Who Did Salvation Bring – Bernard of Clairvaux translated by Anthony W. Boehm.

Choose another poem from your own culture.

BIBLE STUDIES

Read the Scripture references to determine how they relate to the section heading.

1. *Creation and Fall: the biblical witness*

Compare *Romans 5:12-14* with *Jeremiah 2:20-21*. Discuss ways in which both heredity and cultural pressures lead us all into sin.

2. *Created in the image of God*

How does *Hebrews 2:5-18* help you to realise how Jesus, God's true man, enables us to regain God's original intention for us as his children and heirs?

3. *Fallen humanity*

How would you convince a sceptic of the truth of *Psalm 14:1-3*? Give contemporary examples of both individual and social sins.

4. *The origin of sin*

From your reading of *Genesis 3:1-7*, identify the human indicators of the presence of evil: for example, lack of trust in God; openness to suggested wrongdoing.

5. *The nature of sin*

Reflect on the wisdom of *James 1:13-15*. What does this teach you about personal responsibility for sinning and the tendencies of our sinful nature?

6. *Original sin and depravity*

From your study of *Romans 5:12-15;6:11-14* say how Paul's insights show that God in Christ deals with both original sin and depravity. How does *Hebrews 9:11-15* enlarge your understanding of this remedy for sin?

7. *The consequence of sin*

a) Separation from God

Read *Matthew 25:31-46*, then discuss how final separation from God flows naturally from separation from humanity and is self-inflicted.

b) The wrath of God

Using *Matthew 18:1-9* and *Matthew 21:12-16* discuss how the wrath of God is revealed through the actions of Jesus?

8. *Salvation through the grace of God*

Which of the selected Scriptures best encourage you to hope in salvation from sin for yourself and all the world (*Salvation Story* pages 65-66)?

9. *Sermon series suggestions*

a) 'Vast the curse and great the fall, Jesus Christ has died for all.' (SASB 243)

A real dilemma – Fallen humanity, *Salvation Story*, page 60

A sufficient remedy – Salvation through the grace of God, *Salvation Story*, page 65

A gospel for the here and now – A world to be saved, *Salvation Story*, page 66

b) 'My need and thy great fulness meet, And I have all in thee.' (SASB 741)

Our extremity – The consequence of Sin – Separation from God, The wrath of God, *Salvation Story*, pages 64-65

God's initiative – The Atonement Foreshadowed, *Salvation Story*, page 68

Eternal consequences – Ultimate accountability, Judgement, Hell and Heaven, *Salvation Story*, pages 119-120

SALVATION STORY STUDY GUIDE

CHAPTER SEVEN

Salvation Story

The doctrine of the Atonement

Related Doctrines

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ has by His suffering and death made an atonement for the whole world so that whosoever will may be saved.

We believe that repentance towards God, faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and regeneration by the Holy Spirit, are necessary to salvation.

N.B. – Before commencing on the following study guide for chapter seven of *Salvation Story*, read the chapter in the Handbook in its entirety, including each of the Scripture references.

BELIEF

1. Historical summary

a) Old Testament teaching

The doctrine of the Atonement is central to the teaching of Scripture both in the Old Testament and the New.

The sacrificial system as outlined in the first five books of the law established the perceived and revealed need for daily sacrifices as sin offerings: 'Sacrifice a bull each day as a sin offering to make atonement' (*Exodus 29:36*). The people of God recognised their sinfulness, their unrighteousness, their inability to keep the law of God, so they needed a 'covering' for their sins, which is what the Hebrew words translated as 'Atonement' in the Old Testament mean – 'cover' or 'coverings' or 'to cover'. The sacrifice provided a covering for sin, a screen shielding God from it, a release from the burden, a leaving it behind. It was also seen as an 'aroma pleasing to the Lord', an indication of the restoration of the sinner's relationship with God (*Leviticus 1:17*). Sins were blotted out so that sinners could come to a holy God.

The day of Atonement as a special annual observance became the single most important day for the Israelites. Even in modern usage the Jewish observance of *Yom Kippur* (literally 'day of Atonement') remains as their most important commemoration as they recognise the continued need for coverings. The observance of such a day is particularly referred to in the sixteenth chapter of Leviticus. 'This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: Atonement is to be made once a year for all the sins of the Israelites' (*Leviticus 16:34*).

The sacrifice of Atonement in the Old Testament took place at the initiative of God. God provided for the sacrifice. 'I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar' (*Leviticus 17:11*). That is, the covering of forgiveness for sin had to do primarily with God's gracious provision rather than with human actions. The Old Testament, as well as the New, witnesses to the grace and mercy of God.

Part of that graciousness was reflected in God's allowance for the substitute sacrifice to be that of an animal rather than a human, in contrast to the surrounding context of a pagan culture. This merciful provision was particularly underlined in the story of Abraham and Isaac with the ram caught in a thicket being sacrificed as a burnt offering instead of Abraham's son (*Genesis 22:13*).

That sacrificial system and day of Atonement took on new meaning as they were interpreted in the prophetic writings. For example in *Isaiah 53* the sacrifice of an animal as a covering for sin becomes personalised in human terms as the sacrifice of one person for the sins of many. 'Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows....he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed' (*Isaiah 53:4-5*). Such a passage foreshadows the sacrifice of Christ on the cross for the sins of the world. Although God provided a ram in a thicket so that Abraham's son did not become a sacrifice for sin, he did not spare the sacrifice of his own Son for the sins of the world.

b) New Testament teaching

When John the Baptist saw Jesus, he had no hesitation in referring to him as 'the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!' (*John 1:29*). This suggests a sacrifice for the sins of the world parallel to the Old Testament concept of Atonement.

Jesus himself spoke of 'the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you' (*Luke 22:20*). In *Mark 8:31* we read that 'He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things...and that he must be killed and after three days rise again' (*Mark 8:31*).

Luke speaks of Jesus' conversation with the two disciples on the Emmaus Road on the day of his resurrection. Perhaps referring to the Old Testament sacrificial system in the books of Moses as interpreted by prophets such as Isaiah, the evangelist says: 'And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself' (*Luke 24:27*).

There are a number of texts that underline for the New Testament what was foreshadowed in the Old Testament, that the initiative in the atonement was taken by God in Christ. For example, in *John 10:17-18* we read the words of Jesus: 'The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.' See also *John 3:16*, *Romans 5:6-8*, *2 Corinthians 5:18-19*.

Through his death on the cross, Christ became 'our Passover lamb' (*1 Corinthians 5:7*), 'a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood' (*Romans 3:25*). It is of particular significance that Christ represents *us* in his death: his death is *for us*. We are convinced that one died *for all*' (*2 Corinthians 5:14*). 'The Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom *for many*' (*Mark 10:45*). 'For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom *for all men*' (*1 Timothy 2:5-6*). Our response is simply to accept by faith what Christ has done *for us*.

The death of Christ on the cross *for us*, different from the recurring deaths of the animals offered as sacrifices in the Old Testament era, was a 'once for all' sacrifice. 'Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again....But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself....Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people....' (*Hebrews 9:25-27*). His was a 'once for all' death as the fulfilment of all that was prefigured by the Old Testament sacrificial system.

c) Church teaching

The meaning of the Atonement has been reinterpreted through successive periods of Church history. The followers of Christ have looked at it in different ways, have seen it in their own ways of understanding, and have discovered its relevance within their own cultural and historical contexts.

Some of those historically different ways of understanding the Atonement are outlined under the heading, 'Understanding the Atonement' on pages 69 to 71 of *Salvation Story*. For further discussion on the stages of Church history involved in that understanding, see section 6, 'Further discussion' below.

2. The importance of the doctrine to Christian faith

The doctrine of the Atonement has been central to the life and ministry of the Church throughout its history. Regardless of differing beliefs as to who can be saved or what human response is necessary to salvation, the focus

of the presentation of Christ as Saviour by all branches of the Christian Church has been the Cross. The importance of the doctrine to Christian faith has been and is still evident in the architectural and artistic symbolism in Christian churches. The cross is predominantly displayed as the sign of the atoning grace of God through the salvation act of the death of Christ for the sins of the world. The salvation story is the story of the Cross.

The 'once for all' nature of that death (*Hebrews 9:26*) means that Christ triumphed over death. He is a resurrected Christ, not a dead Christ on a cross. He is a living Saviour who died 'once for all' for the sins of the world, and those who accept him as Saviour are led to new life through their risen, living, ever-present Lord.

His was however a real death on a real cross, an emphasis which the Church has been making since the first century of its life. (See the 'Further discussion' section of chapter four concerning Gnosticism.) Jesus Christ was a real man who suffered a real death for the sins of the world. That remains the important teaching of the Church concerning Atonement through Christ.

3. Issues for Salvationists

In answer to an inquiry as to what was The Salvation Army's principal doctrine, William Booth is purported to have replied, 'The bleeding Lamb'. In introducing the 1998 issue of the Salvationist Handbook of Doctrine, General Paul Rader indicated that 'the vital heart of the faith of Salvationists is still the redeeming blood of Christ and the purifying and empowering fire of the Spirit'.

The issue for Salvationists is to maintain that centrality of the cross of Christ in the fulfilment of our mission and in the proclamation of our message. We are further committed to the distinctive features of a Wesleyan theology of the Atonement:

- that its benefits are not limited to the elect, since through prevenient grace all are able to respond to the offer of salvation through the death of Christ on the cross (see *Salvation Story* pages 78-79 for information on 'prevenient grace'; also, *Study Guide*, chapter 6, pages 57-58);
- and that whether such a response is positive or negative is conditional upon human free will, so that our responsibility in proclaiming the message of the Atonement to all people is to seek to persuade them towards repentant faith in the Christ of the cross (*Salvation Story* pages 72-73).

The challenge is that each new generation of Salvationists, confronted with the urgency of that message, will make the message its own and preach it convincingly.

4. The essentials of the doctrine

Essentials concerning the doctrine of the Atonement for all branches of the Church include the following:

- its centrality to Christian theology and to an understanding of the person of Christ, since the Cross interprets the life and resurrection of the primary figure of Christian theology;
- its divine mystery in that theories of the Atonement, however valuable, never exhaust its truth;
- its message concerning the fundamental need of humanity: salvation which is beyond human achievement and which can only be thought of as a gift from God;
- its emphasis on the infinite cost of redemption, a cost to God himself.

Although differing Church traditions vary in the value placed on personal experience, it might also be argued that the Atonement was understood in the Church first of all through the experience of being redeemed. A focus of the entire Salvationist Handbook of Doctrine is that we are to make 'his' story, the salvation story through the atoning death of Christ, 'our' story. That focus is affirmed by 20th century theologian H. R. Macintosh who said that 'the (person) who has been forgiven by God knows more about the Atonement than all the theologians who ever lived'.

5. Discussion questions/exercises

- a) Many churches and Salvation Army corps display the symbol of a cross. What is the significance of that in your personal salvation story? Is the use of such a symbol helpful to you? Why or why not?

- b) Under the section entitled 'Understanding the Atonement' (*Salvation Story* pages 69-70), which picture used to interpret the Atonement means the most to you? Why? Is there another picture which would be more meaningful to you?
- c) In our coming to the experience of salvation, what would you consider to be a proper relationship between an emphasis on the grace of God on one hand, and our free response to him on the other? (See *Salvation Story* pages 72-73.)
- d) It was John Wesley who described repentance and faith as the 'porch and door' at the entrance to life in Christ. (See *Salvation Story* pages 73-74.) Is this a meaningful way of describing the link between repentance and faith for you? Can you suggest other pictures to aid that understanding?

6. Further discussion

As indicated above in section one, the meaning of the Atonement has been reinterpreted through successive periods of Church history as followers of Christ have thought about it and understood it in their own ways. This section looks at the development of those different ways of interpreting the Atonement throughout various periods of Church history.

In the 3rd century, the Church Father **Origen** emphasised the sacrificial character of Christ's death as a ransom paid to the powers of evil (sometimes referred to as the 'ransom' theory of the Atonement). But evil was confounded when the payment was made. The very place where it seemed that Satan had done away with Jesus once and for all, was the place where Jesus became victorious over Satan and the powers of evil. Far from being a day symbolising defeat, Good Friday became a day of victory, with Christ as the victor (*Christus Victor*).

In the 4th century, that same thinking can be found in the teachings of **Augustine of Hippo**, but Augustine also laid stress on the significance of the humble life of Jesus as the mediator of the Atonement, and an example for that same humility in humankind: 'The true mediator, whom in Thy secret mercy Thou hast pointed out to the humble, and didst send, that by His example also they might learn the same humility' (sometimes referred to as the 'moral influence' theory of the Atonement).

Anselm, in the 11th and 12th centuries, rejected the thought that the early Church had entertained of the sacrifice of Christ being a ransom paid to the devil. The world had changed and the feudal system of his day was concerned with honour and satisfaction. Anselm therefore used the language of his time and society. Sin was dishonouring to God and God's nature demanded satisfaction, a satisfaction which an ordinary person could not render (sometimes referred to as the 'satisfaction' theory of the Atonement). Such satisfaction could only be offered by one who shares human nature and yet as God has something of infinite value to offer. Such a one is the God-man Christ Jesus. And not only is his sacrifice a satisfaction, it deserves a reward, the reward of the eternal blessedness of his brothers and sisters.

Abelard, also in the 12th century, like Anselm, rejected the Atonement theory of a ransom to the devil, but he repudiated as well Anselm's doctrine of satisfaction. In his view the incarnation and death of Christ are the highest expression of God's love to men, the effect of which is to awaken love in us (another aspect of what is sometimes referred to as the 'moral influence' theory of the Atonement).

In the 13th century, Thomas **Aquinas** admitted that God could conceivably have forgiven sins and granted grace without the sacrifice of Christ, but he suggested that the work of Christ on the cross is the wisest and most efficient method God as the governor of the universe could choose to effect Atonement (sometimes referred to as the 'government' theory of the Atonement). That work involves satisfaction for sin and it also moves us to love. In this teaching Aquinas developed and combined views presented by Anselm and Abelard.

In the Reformation period of the 16th century, Martin **Luther** taught that salvation involves a new relationship to God, based not on any work of merit on our part, but on trust and faith in Christ. Christ has borne our sins, and by grace through faith, we in turn are made right in the sight of God. Our righteousness, then, is God's gift. There is no room for our free will response, as our will is in bondage to sin (*The Bondage of the Will*, 1525). This was a response to the teaching of humanist scholars such as **Erasmus** of Rotterdam. In his paper of 1524 entitled *The Freedom of the Will*, Erasmus maintained that in our salvation both God *and* us, grace *and* free will are at work. According to Erasmus, the grace of God is the primary factor in our salvation, and the exercise of free will the secondary, but necessary response.

Another great figure of the 16th century reformation period, John **Calvin**, like Luther thought of no human work as having any merit, that all are in a state of ruin meriting only damnation. From that helpless condition some are undeservedly rescued through the work of Christ. He paid the penalty due for the sins of those on whose behalf he died (sometimes referred to as the 'substitution' theory of the Atonement). But all that Christ did on the cross is of no avail unless it is our personal possession, and because we are unable to initiate or resist such possession on our own, Calvin emphasised that such possession is also effected by divine choice. Some are saved, others are lost by divine choice.

That Calvinistic teaching of election and predestination and a limited atonement produced a strong adverse reaction especially amongst Anabaptists. The fullest expression of that Anabaptist reaction was in the work of Jacobus **Arminius** in the latter part of the 16th and the beginning of the 17th century. His views as developed by his disciples became known as 'Arminianism' and were views which later were largely adopted in Wesleyan Salvation Army teaching. There are five main points of difference between Calvinism and Arminianism. These can be summarised in the acrostic **TULIP**, an acrostic outlining Calvinistic principles which were developed by Calvin's followers through their interpretation of his teaching.

Calvinistic principles

a) Total depravity: 'original sin is seen to be an hereditary depravity and corruption of our nature, diffused into all parts of the soul...For our nature is not merely bereft of good, but is so productive of every kind of evil that it cannot be inactive'. (John Calvin)

b) Unconditional election and predestination: 'No one who wishes to be thought religious dares outright to deny predestination, by which God chooses some for the hope of life, and condemns others to eternal death...By predestination we mean the eternal decree of God, by which he has decided in his own mind what he wishes to happen in the case of each individual.' (John Calvin)

c) Limited Atonement: the implication of the doctrine of unconditional election and predestination for Calvinists was that the personal benefits of the Atonement of Christ on the cross were limited to the elect only.

d) Irresistible grace: a further implication of the doctrine of unconditional election and predestination for Calvinists was that for the elect, divine grace is irresistible. It is the eternal decree of God that those destined to be saved should receive his grace.

e) Perseverance of the saints: also following from the doctrine of unconditional election and predestination was the doctrine that those saved would persevere to the end as children of God – once saved, always saved.

Arminian teaching

Arminianism agreed with Calvinism in denying the ability of humanity to do anything really good of themselves. Humankind is totally depraved in that no part of personality has escaped the power of sin. All good is therefore of divine grace. The later followers of Arminianism however, particularly John Wesley, indicated that the natural state of humanity is itself in some sense a state of grace so that all can make a response to the gift of Atonement. It was this teaching which rendered distinctiveness to the Wesleyan concept of 'prevenient grace', the grace that comes before conversion.

In contrast to the Calvinist doctrine of unconditional election and absolute predestination, the Arminians taught a predestination based on the divine foreknowledge of the use which would be made by each individual of the means of grace. God's grace is available to all, but it is up to human free will as to whether that grace is accepted or rejected. Election is therefore conditional on freely made human choice.

Against the doctrine that the benefits of the Atonement of Christ on the cross were limited to the elect only, the Arminians asserted that he died for all, though none receive the personal benefits of his death except those who believe.

In opposition to the doctrine of irresistible grace, Arminians taught that grace may be rejected. God would not resist the free will of humans to refuse to accept his grace.

Arminians taught that it is possible that those saved may lose grace once received, so that the eternal security or perseverance of the saints is dependent on free will.

John **Wesley** in the 18th century accepted and developed the Arminian views stated above. With reference to the Atonement he said that 'nothing in the Christian system is of greater consequence than the doctrine of the Atonement'. A 20th century commentator on the teaching of Wesley, Albert Outler, says that 'in a hundred different ways on thousands of different occasions,...his one consistent message was Jesus Christ and him crucified – *Christus crucifixus, Christus redemptor, Christus victor*'. One of the distinctive features of Wesleyan theology with reference to the Atonement is that Christ tasted death for every man so that the saving benefits of the Atonement are not limited to the elect. All are able to make a response to the grace flowing from the Atonement.

LIFE

1. *Lifestyle and ethics*

If the Atonement is God's act of unconditional love for all people everywhere, is it all right to 'go on sinning so that grace may increase' (*Romans 6:1*)? Explain the reasons for your response.

2. *Mission of the Church*

Terms such as the 'grace of God', the 'Atonement' and the 'blood of Christ' are not readily used in today's society. Discuss how such terms can be translated for contemporary understanding.

3. *Personal ministry*

What are some of the ways through which I might help people known to me experience the grace of Christ by accepting the benefits of the Atonement personally?

WORSHIP

1. Read the section of this chapter of *Salvation Story* entitled 'The Atonement completed' (*Salvation Story* page 69).

- a) Focus in worship on the cross of Christ.
- b) Your worship may be helped by looking at a picture of Christ on the cross (one available to you or drawn by you).
- c) Find a phrase in the second paragraph of the section that most helps you to identify with the Christ of the cross.

2. Suggestions for meditation:

Scripture: *Isaiah 53:3-6*
Luke 2:11
John 3:16
Matthew 27:45-54
2 Corinthians 5:17-19

Songs SASB (1986)
105 Alas! and did my Saviour bleed
114 Jesus came down my ransom to be
123 O sacred head now wounded
129 Once, on a day, was Christ led forth to die

Song 136

1. When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.
2. Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
Save in the death of Christ, my God;
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to his blood.
3. See, from his head, his hands, his feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down;
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?
4. Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

(Isaac Watts (1674-1748))

Other: artwork depicting the crucifixion, tapes or compact discs with music or musical groups with messages concerning the crucifixion of Christ on the Cross

BIBLE STUDIES

Before engaging in discussion, read the appropriate section of the text along with suggested Bible references under the heading indicated.

1. *The Atonement foreshadowed* (*Salvation Story* pages 68-69)

In what ways do the Bible references given speak to you of the saving work of God in Jesus Christ? Discuss *Acts 8:32-35*. How would you respond today to a person wondering about what *Isaiah 53:7-8* is talking about?

2. *The Atonement completed* (*Salvation Story* page 69)

Look at *2 Corinthians 5:17-21*. Consider how God's way of reconciliation might be the pattern for reconciliation to be made between peoples. You could reflect upon a current example of conflict.

3. *Understanding the Atonement* (*Salvation Story* pages 69-71)

Note the ways in which the Scripture references relate to each part of this section, that is, *Mark 10:45* for ransom, *John 10:11-18* for substitution, etc.

Discuss *Colossians 2:13-15*. How can the Cross, the place of defeat, become the place of triumph?

4. *Our crucified and risen Lord* (*Salvation Story* page 71)

From the Scripture references given, describe the significance of the Resurrection for our salvation story.

Discuss *1 Corinthians 15:3-4*. In what ways is this a good summary of the gospel message? How might you seek to lead someone to Christ through the use of this passage?

5. *Death and life for all believers* (*Salvation Story* pages 71-72)

Look at *Romans 5:1-4*. Discuss the sentence at the top of page 72, *Salvation Story*, 'To turn away from our sinful life and to come to Christ in repentance and faith is to experience a kind of death'. Do you agree with that statement? Can you relate the statement to your own personal experience? If so, how?

6. *Grace and free will* (*Salvation Story* pages 72-73)

Look at the story of the prodigal son in *Luke 15:11-32*. Where do you see 'grace' and 'free will' at work here? Discuss the last sentence of the second last paragraph of this section in terms of the story of the prodigal son: 'The grace of God is such that, with profound sorrow, he allows us to reject him'.

7. Repentance and faith (*Salvation Story* pages 73-74)

Look at *Matthew 3:1-10* and *4:17-22*. Both John the Baptist and Jesus call for repentance. What are the distinctive elements in the messages they proclaim?

8. Sermon series suggestions

- a) The Atonement foreshadowed: *Isaiah 53:4 – 6*
The Atonement completed: *John 19:30*
Understanding the Atonement: *John 3:16* (*Salvation Story* pages 68-71)

- b) The saving Christ as ransom: *Mark 10:45*
 substitute: *2 Corinthians 5:21*
 sacrifice: *Hebrews 10:9 – 14*
 victor: *Colossians 2:13 – 15*
 love: *Romans 5:8* (*Salvation Story* pages 69-71)

- c) Death and life: *Romans 6:5*
Grace and free will: *Luke 15:11 – 32*
Repentance and faith: *Acts 3:19* (*Salvation Story* pages 71-74)

SALVATION STORY STUDY GUIDE

CHAPTER EIGHT

Salvation Experience

The doctrine of salvation

Related doctrines

We believe that repentance towards God, faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and regeneration by the Holy Spirit are necessary to salvation .

We believe that we are justified by grace through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and that he that believeth hath the witness in himself.

We believe that continuance in a state of salvation depends upon continued obedient faith in Christ.

N.B. – Before commencing on the following study guide for chapter eight of *Salvation Story*, read the chapter in the Handbook in its entirety, including each of the Scripture references.

BELIEF

1. Historical summary

a) The Old Testament

As Christians, we know that our salvation depends upon our faith in Jesus Christ, who is revealed to us through the witness of the New Testament. But we also acknowledge the debt we owe to the Old Testament. Here, in the story of the pilgrimage of God's people, we see God constantly at work to bring his people into a new relationship with himself and with one another. God's saving character is revealed through the events of Hebrew history, through what God did as well as through who he was. The central moment was the Exodus, when the Hebrew slaves were released from oppression in Egypt and guided to the promised land: "The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and bring them up out of this land...." (*Exodus 3:7-8*).

From this great event, kept alive through constant recollection and re-enactment, the saving nature of God was revealed. The hope grew that one who had saved in the past would continue to exercise his saving grace in the present. God's people would be finally vindicated and a new world order brought into being. This was the Old Testament model of salvation.

The Exodus experience convinced the Hebrew slaves that God was on their side. He freed his people from oppression and restored their lost identity. He restored them to fellowship with himself, offering the Covenant, the Law and the sacrificial system to help them in their continuing walk with him. God is the one who vindicates his people, acting on behalf of those who are oppressed, whether by captivity, poverty, injustice or sin. The Psalms are full of references to his saving character, for example, 'Vindicate me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation' prays the psalmist in *Psalms 43*. The image is one of the court of law, with the psalmist pleading with God to acquit him from the charges laid by the enemy. He pleads trustfully to one who by righting the wrong liberates from oppression. This can refer to the oppression

caused by sin or by circumstances. God vindicates the deserving and the undeserving: he accepts and forgives (justifies) those who turn to him. His people can have confidence in him.

The later Old Testament writers, especially the great prophets, grappled with the ongoing political disasters of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. They believed they were caused by the continuing disobedience of God's people. Called into a special relationship with God that they could not maintain, with leaders who constantly failed them, the people lurched towards spiritual and political disintegration. Nevertheless, the prophets continued God's message of hope as they looked towards his promise of inward renewal: 'The time is coming,' declares the Lord, 'when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah....I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.' (*Jeremiah 31:31,33*)

The call to holiness originated in the Old Testament: 'Be holy, because I am holy' (*Leviticus 11:45*) was God's command, one that he made possible by his grace. God could renew and restore the broken life and create the means for his people to continue to walk with him in trustful obedience. The sacrificial system was a gift of God's grace to enable his people to approach him. And the promise of inward regeneration seen in the later Old Testament writings was equally to be made possible only by the gift of God.

b) The New Testament

There is a clear and direct relationship between the Old Testament understanding of salvation and the New Testament. The experience of God's people recorded in the Old Testament looks forward to the great saving event of the Cross, when God decisively revealed his willingness to act on our behalf. In the New Testament, God reveals himself once again as the one who rescues, who justifies and who is the author of new life. But now, crucially, his saving grace is revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus' self-offering and death is the great saving event, in one sense the new exodus. (See for example, *Luke 9:31*, which speaks of Jesus' passion as his 'departure' or 'exodus'.) Jesus is not only the prophet of God's mercy and love, he is himself the source and revealer of that mercy. His death and his resurrection provide the means whereby all people, not only the Jewish nation, can receive the forgiveness of sins and be restored to an open relationship with God through the gift of the Holy Spirit (*Acts 2:38*). Through Jesus, all people everywhere may benefit from God's mercy and find new life in him.

The New Testament writers show in a number of different ways that in Jesus' teaching and through his life-story God's grace has been released into the world in a whole new way. Jesus' message was one of salvation. In the first public words that Luke records, Jesus announced the good news that the freedom and renewal promised through the prophet Isaiah were coming to fruition (*Luke 4:16-21*). By his actions, Jesus revealed the nature of God's salvation. He fed the hungry, healed the sick, forgave sins and announced the joy of the Kingdom of God. His teaching made clear that God stood alongside and vindicated those who humbly put their faith in him: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven' (*Matthew 5:3*). The tax collector rather than the Pharisee was justified before God because he prayed, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner' (*Luke 18:3*). The unmerciful servant was thrown into outer darkness because he had received mercy and failed to give it (*Matthew 18:21-35*). The Kingdom of God was the inheritance of those who accepted the gift of new life in humble and believing faith (*John 3:16*).

Jesus' rejection by his own people and the inevitable road to the Cross opened up the way of salvation. For the New Testament writers, the act of self-giving love on the Cross and the vindication of Jesus through his resurrection became the saving event for all humanity (see for example *John 10:7-11; 12:31-33; Acts 2:22-39; Romans 3:21-26; 5:18-21; 6:3-4; Hebrews 2:10-18*). The result was a new revelation of God's saving character, the possibility of a new relationship with him, a new kind of life for those who trust him, a new security in his presence, a new family, a new humanity and a new creation.

Paul is the great teacher of salvation. For Paul, the sacrifice of Christ has brought the twin blessings of liberation and entry into God's new life. 'Through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death' (*Romans 8:2*). 'If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!' (*2 Corinthians 5:17*). Together, this is salvation. Faith in Christ brings deliverance from sin, from the principalities and powers, from the restrictive guardianship of the Jewish Law, from the weakness of our human nature. The new life begins with Christ and will go on into the new world that God is preparing for his people when Christ will come again. (See for example, *1 Thessalonians 4:13-17*)

The means of salvation is justification by grace through faith in Christ. Paul sets out his teaching in *Romans* and *Galatians*. His concern, especially in *Galatians*, was about the plight of Gentile Christians. Should they

have to obey the Jewish law in order to be full-fledged Christians? His answer was certainly not! We are justified, that is restored to a right relationship with God, solely by faith in Jesus, the crucified and risen Messiah (see *Romans 3-5; Galatians 3:23-4:6*). There is nothing that needs to be added to faith in Christ, and people of all races and social situations may come to him and be made into a new people, witnesses of his grace (*Galatians 3:28*). God's freedom is for all.

c) Church Teaching

Throughout the history of the Church, the biblical witness has been successively re-interpreted in the light of the prevailing world order. In the ancient world, scholars such as Origen explored the biblical truth of freedom in Christ against the background of a primitive culture ruled by fear of enemies both in this world and in the world of the spirits. Salvation meant to be freed from such fears and to know Jesus Christ as the one who sets the prisoners free. In medieval times, the fear of hell was very real and personal freedoms were circumscribed by rigid social structures. The Roman Church preached salvation by grace, but some of its practices often bolstered fears rather than relieved them (for example, the pressure to sell papal indulgences for the remission of sin). The Reformation, led by Martin Luther, spoke to individuals of the possibility of salvation by faith. It spoke directly to the needs of those who, like Luther himself, were searching for a gracious God. This experience of grace and freedom had untold social and political, as well as spiritual, consequences.

And the spiritual consequences were immense. The way of salvation, and its outcome for individuals and societies became the subject of immense thought and deep scholarship. The doctrines of justification, regeneration and sanctification were given shape and meaning through the writings successively of Luther, John Calvin, John Wesley and many others who followed in the pietist tradition. 18th and 19th century revivalism was built on these doctrines – salvation from sin through the grace of God, the reality of justification and new life in Christ and the possibility of entire sanctification. As for Salvationists, they are the foundation, both of our spiritual lives and of our mission. For more comment, see the Further Discussion section below.

2. The importance of the doctrine to Christian faith

a) The doctrine of salvation is vital for our understanding of the nature of God.

It shows us that we worship a saving God, one who understands our plight and comes to rescue us. This is shown especially in the gift and in the work of Jesus Christ.

The doctrine shows us that God's purpose is our re-creation in the image of his Son, Jesus and our freedom from the power of sin. Through faith in Jesus, we can be led into a free, open and growing relationship with God.

b) The doctrine of salvation is vital for our self understanding.

It reminds us that a free, personal relationship with God is our inheritance and our right; and that we can be re-made by the exercise of humble, trusting faith in Christ and come to our true selves.

It reminds us that this potential and privilege is the right of all humanity without distinction.

c) The doctrine of salvation helps us to understand the nature of the Church.

The Church is the family of those who have accepted Christ as Saviour, who have been born again by the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit and been incorporated into the body of Christ. To be saved is far more than to receive a personal new life: we are part of God's new society, his people called out to convey the good news to the world.

d) The doctrine of salvation confirms God's purposes for our world.

Salvation in the biblical sense does not only concern individuals and communities but affects the entire world order. We are promised 'a new heaven and a new earth'. All history is moving towards the fulfilment

of God's purposes for the entire universe, 'to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ' (*Ephesians 1:10*).

3. *Issues for Salvationists*

a) Sharing the good news is the Salvationists' calling.

The doctrine of salvation is central to Salvationist teaching and practice. We are a 'Salvation' Army proclaiming the good news of salvation through faith in Christ and calling people to forsake sin and turn to God. We offer hope in Christ to the sinful, the poor and the dispossessed, and the chance of new life in him.

b) The good news is for all.

We seek to make our message plain and relevant in all cultures and in every part of the world, and so to share the gospel with all without distinction. God's offer is for all people, regardless of wealth or poverty, race, colour, nationality or gender. It is especially important to remember this where we live in multi-cultural and multi-religious societies when the temptation to preach only to those who share our own cultural heritage can be very strong.

c) The good news is central to all our activities.

All our activities, practical, social and spiritual, arise out of our basic conviction of the reality of the love of God and our desire to see all people brought into relationship with him. For us, there can be no social service that is divorced from the exercise of faith. Our doctrine reminds us that salvation is holistic: the gracious work of the Holy Spirit touches all areas of our life and personality, our physical, emotional and spiritual well-being, our relationships with our families and with the world around us. When we exercise practical care or seek to bring about healing in families and in communities, we are sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ.

4. *Essentials of the doctrine*

The essential elements of the doctrine of salvation include the following:

- a) salvation is God's gift, the initiative of his grace;
- b) salvation is offered by God to all people unconditionally;
- c) salvation means we are accepted by God unconditionally and promised a new way of life through him;
- d) our salvation depends both on the grace of God and upon our response of faith.

5. *Discussion questions/exercises*

- a) Do you agree that salvation means freedom and new life? If so, how do you think this central truth can be seen to be relevant to the present generation?
- b) Many Christians who have grown up in the Church find it difficult to identify a moment when they experienced salvation. Charles H. Spurgeon once remarked that 'a man's ignorance of the precise time of his birth is no evidence that he is not alive'. What evidence should there be to indicate that someone has been born again?
- c) 'Continuance in a state of salvation depends upon continued obedient faith in Christ' (Article 9 of Salvation Army doctrines). Discuss this article of faith in the light of the commentary on pages 83-85 of *Salvation Story*.
- d) Share moments of assurance of salvation that God has given you. (See also further discussion section.)

6. Further discussion

a) Justification

Paul's teaching on justification was taken up in early Christianity by *Augustine of Hippo* (354- 430). If much of Paul's teaching was focussed on faith, Augustine's teaching centred around the primacy of God's grace. Augustine believed human beings to be by nature morally frail and fatally susceptible to evil. This was challenged by the British monk, Pelagius, who taught that the human will was strong and free to choose salvation (See *Salvation Story* Study Guide chapter 6 Further Discussion.). Augustine strongly disputed this. Our salvation comes to us only by the grace of God. We cannot choose whether to be saved or not: God alone is the author of our new life. His grace leads us to faith in Christ. It is then that we are free to love and choose the good and are restored to a right attitude towards God. We are made right and justified by grace. Thereafter, we live in this new relationship wholly by the grace of God: 'There is need for every man...in respect of any righteousness he possesses not to presume that it has come of his own making, but to accept it as of the grace of God who justifies.' (*The Spirit and the Letter*)

Martin Luther, the 16th century monk, came to his understanding of justification on a very personal agenda, which could be paraphrased: 'How can I find a gracious God?' His impeccable attention to the monastic rule had left him with a troubled conscience which nothing would assuage until in his reading of *Romans chapter 1* he realised that the phrase 'the righteousness of God' (1:17) referred not to God's desire to punish the sinner, but to save him. God graciously gives the righteousness which human beings cannot attain. The sole requirement is trusting faith. This discovery brought personal liberation to Luther. His subsequent teaching of salvation by faith alone brought him into conflict with the Roman Church and led to the Protestant Reformation.

Augustine had spoken of justification as being made right with God: for Luther, justification does not *make* us righteous, so much as *count* us righteous. Our salvation involves taking upon ourselves the righteousness of Christ which is never our own, but his. Luther spoke of our 'alien' righteousness. Our sin is like a set of filthy clothes which we exchange for the robes of Christ. The 'clothes' belong to Christ: so the sinful nature remains beneath the 'covering' of Christ. We can be sinners in our own eyes, but righteous before God. In this way, we realise that we are always dependent upon the grace of God, not upon our own efforts. This understanding has had a profound effect upon Protestantism, for it leads directly to the question of how, then, is the justified Christian set free to become in reality what he already is in Christ? 'Shall we go on sinning, so that grace may increase?' (*Romans 6:1*). This was one of the fears of those who challenged Luther's doctrine of justification in the following centuries, the fear of moral laxity – antinomianism. This issue is addressed in the doctrines of regeneration and sanctification.

b) Regeneration

The doctrine of regeneration is the doctrine of the new birth. The history of this doctrine is to be found within that stream of Christianity called pietism. Pietism is a challenge to sterile, orthodox religion and correct, but lifeless doctrine: it is a call to personal experience. Its aim is to restore lost zeal and the reality of religious conviction.

The great representative of the pietist tradition was *John Wesley* (1703-1791) whose teaching was centred, not so much on the changed relationship with God that justification brings, as on the changed life that is the privilege of those who are born of God. Faith in Christ brings salvation, that is, freedom from sin and also from its power, 'He who is thus justified, or saved by faith, is indeed born again. He is born again of the Spirit unto a new life...' (*Sermons on Several Occasions* published 1944).

Wesley made a significant distinction between justification and regeneration:

Though it be allowed that justification and the new birth are, in point of time, inseparable from each other, yet they are easily distinguished, as being not the same, but things of a widely different nature. Justification implies only a relative, the new birth a real, change. God in justifying us does something *for* us; in begetting us again, he does the work *in* us. The former changes our outward relation to God so that of enemies we become children; by the latter our inmost souls are changed, so that of sinners we become saints' (*The works of John Wesley* ed. Jackson Sermon 15).

Regeneration, then, describes the working of God's Holy Spirit in our inmost being, which enables us to grow more and more like Christ. As the Spirit works within us, something of the righteousness of Christ is bestowed upon us. We experience the benefits of the new creation, the true humanity re-made in the image of God. We are freed by the Spirit to become our true selves and to put our hope and our trust in the living God. This new life is not perfection: it is our positive response to God's call to engage in the good fight of faith, to lay aside all distractions and follow Christ. This process is never completed in this life, but is growing and developing all the time as the Holy spirit reveals to us more of our own need of the power of Christ. It is initial sanctification.

c) Assurance

One other significant blessing of salvation is the Holy Spirit's gift of assurance. Our eighth doctrine makes this point when it states, quoting *1 John 5:10*: 'He that believeth hath the witness in himself'. Because of God's great mercy, we can have confidence that our salvation is secure. This is a particularly Protestant teaching. In Roman Catholic teaching, human conviction is fallible: it is rather presumptuous to be sure of God's favour. In contrast, Protestants stress the trustworthiness of God. 'The giver of the promise can be trusted' (*Hebrews 10:22-23*).

It is this assurance that John Wesley sought and found in his 'Aldersgate experience' of 1738:

About a quarter before nine, while he (the one who was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans) was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for my salvation, and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.

d) Backsliding

Assurance of salvation is not the same as final perseverance, a doctrine which has its roots in Calvinism. It implies that our salvation is so 'secure' that it cannot be negated in any way through our personal behaviour or response to God. The seeds of this approach can be found in the teaching of Augustine. His emphasis on the supremacy of God's grace led him to understand salvation as being given wholly at God's discretion. God's grace is a gift, which some may receive and some not. So, although sin is universal, grace is particular. Augustine called this election. This leads inevitably to the conclusion that some will be saved – by God's grace – and some not. Some are 'elected' to be saved – though Augustine did not go on to the logical conclusion that some must therefore be elected to be damned.

This was the leap made by John Calvin in his *Institutes of Religion*: 'For all are not created in equal condition, but eternal life is foreordained for some and eternal damnation for others' (*Institutes 3:21*). For that reason, said Calvin, it is impossible for those who have been truly saved to backslide, for that would be to deny the grace of God.

In opposition to this, Arminians have always maintained that such backsliding is possible. 'Continuance in a state of salvation depends upon continued obedient faith in Christ' (Doctrine 9). God graciously gives free will, so that we may respond to his grace and also, if we desire, turn away from it. See also the further discussion section in *Salvation Story*, chapter 7.

e) A Theology of liberation

Much of this historical thinking has helped to shape the thought of our own generation and is relevant to current concerns. If salvation means liberation, there are many in contemporary society who are seeking it. They are often not concerned so much with individual and spiritual salvation as with the more concrete reality of freedom from physical and material oppression. In the 20th century, women sought to become free from physical, psychological and economic domination of men, ethnic minorities from historical and economic domination and the poor from the domination of the rich. The phrase 'liberation theology' is usually understood to refer to the Roman Catholic movement in Latin America where many in the Church declared that God was on the side of the poor and involved in the fight for freedom and justice. Therefore, God's people must follow Christ in service to the poor and involvement in their plight, even if they suffer for it. Some theologians equated salvation with this political liberation, though others maintained that at

the very least salvation in the Christian sense must include both spiritual and material freedom. For example, Leonardo Boff: 'The salvation proclaimed by Christianity is an all-embracing one. It is not restricted to economic, political, social and ideological emancipation, but neither can it be realised without them.' (*Jesus Christ Liberator*, page 275)

Concerns such as these, even if over-stated, are relevant for our understanding of the doctrine of salvation. Salvation has a wide connotation, matching the breadth and depth of human need. For Paul, salvation meant liberation from sin as well as from the confines of the Jewish law. For Augustine, it meant freedom from the corruption of the human will; for Luther, from the agonies of a troubled conscience; and for Wesley, from the darkness of the old life. These are aspects of the human condition which are relevant at any period of history. But so are the aspects of our social situation that are emphasised by some today. Salvation is not only an individual reality; it has a social context. It relates to wholeness of life and a sense of all-round well-being. It therefore has to do with material freedoms as well as spiritual ones. It relates to the healing of communities as well as of individuals. Jesus came to set us free from all that binds us.

LIFE

1. *Life style and ethics*

'Jesus makes me free indeed, just as free as Heaven' (*SASB* 546 v.2). Many non-Christians think of Christianity as restrictive rather than liberating. How could you convince a friend or neighbour that your Christian life-style is actually a life of freedom? (*1 Corinthians* 8, 9 may be helpful here.)

2. *The mission of the Church*

In what ways can Christians communicate the joy of the gospel and demonstrate the changes that it brings:

- a) to individual lives?
- b) to the lives of societies and communities?

3. *Personal ministry*

In what ways can you share with others your faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour?

Take an opportunity to pray for someone known to you, that God will open up a way for you to share your faith. Think about your approach.

WORSHIP

1. Read the section entitled 'Justification' in *Salvation Story*, pages 77-78.
2. Meditate on the story of the prodigal son in *Luke 15* and try to imagine it from the point of view of the father and then of each of his sons. Think about the scope of the father's love and the response of the brothers. A group could 'role play' the story to similar effect.
3. Find songs and choruses that describe the joy of the Christian's spiritual home-coming and acceptance by God.
4. Extracts from John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* may be a helpful aid to worship, particularly where the book describes the joy of the pilgrim as he loses his burden at the Cross.
5. You may be able to take a walk to a favourite beauty spot, thinking on the way of the ups and downs of our spiritual journey and the joy of our arrival in God's presence.

6. In prayer, use *Psalms 103* to praise God for his forgiveness and healing, and the freedom he brings by his love and compassion. Pray for those who do not yet know the depth of God's grace.

BIBLE STUDIES

Before engaging in discussion, read the appropriate section of the text along with suggested Bible references, under the heading indicated.

1. **Justification** (*Salvation Story* pages 77-78)

Use *Titus 3:3-7* to highlight the truths shown in Jesus' parable of the prodigal son in *Luke 15:11-32*. What does the presence of the elder brother in the story have to teach us about the grace and mercy of God?

2. **Justified by grace** (*Salvation Story* pages 78-79)

Using the various Bible references, find as many examples as you can of 'prevenient grace', the grace of God that is at work in us before conversion.

Spend some time meditating on *Ephesians 2:4-10*. What does the passage say God has done for us?

What does it say about why he did it? How do these verses help you to understand the phrase 'the grace of God'?

3. **Justification through faith** (*Salvation Story* pages 79-80)

Concentrate on *Psalms 103*, verses 1-12

- a) In verses 3-6, identify the various 'benefits' of God's grace the Psalmist outlines. In what ways do they all relate to the blessing of salvation?
- b) How do verses 8-14 help us to exercise faith in the compassion and love of God?

4. **Regeneration** (*Salvation Story* pages 80-82)

Compare *Ezekiel 36:24-27* and *John 3:3-8*.

In these verses the work of the Spirit is described as :

- an experience of cleansing (*Ezekiel 36:25* and *John 3:5*);
- the gift of a new heart (*Ezekiel 36:26*);
- a new birth (*John 3:4-7*).

In what ways do these pictures relate to your own experience of conversion?

5. **Assurance** (*Salvation Story* pages 82-83)

Look at the Scripture references that follow this section in *Salvation Story*. Which of them would you use to help someone who was unsure of eternal salvation?

6. **Backsliding** (*Salvation Story* pages 83-84)

The Scripture references given from the letter to the *Hebrews* contain some very strong warnings about backsliding. Read the suggested passages in *Hebrews* carefully. How can we guard against the danger of falling away from our faith?

Read *John 15:16*, *1 Corinthians 10:6-13* and *Revelation 2:4-5*. What are the safeguards against backsliding that these passages teach?

7. Sermon Series Suggestions

- a) A short series on justification could echo the famous hymn:
Ransomed, Healed, Restored, Forgiven,
Who like thee his praise should sing? (SASB 17)

- b) A series on regeneration entitled 'Come alive to Christ'
Opening our lives to the Spirit (*John 3:3-8*)
Dead to sin and alive to Christ (*Romans 6:1-11*)
Children of God (*Romans 8:9-17*)
Renewal in the Spirit (*Titus 3:3-7*)

SALVATION STORY STUDY GUIDE

CHAPTER NINE

Full Salvation

The doctrine of holiness

Related Doctrines

We believe that continuance in a state of salvation depends upon continued obedient faith in Christ.

We believe that it is the privilege of all believers to be wholly sanctified, and that their whole spirit and soul and body may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ

N.B. – Before commencing on the following study guide for chapter nine of *Salvation Story*, read the chapter in the Handbook in its entirety, including each of the Scripture references.

BELIEF

1. *Short historical summary*

The belief in the possibility of living a holy life and of encountering the sanctifying Spirit of God is a distinct experience integral to Salvation Army teaching and faith. It is a vital heritage from the teaching of John Wesley and the Wesleyan movement from which The Salvation Army originated.

a) Old Testament

It is clear in the Old Testament that holiness is not inherent in creation. It is an attribute of God who bestows it on people. He sanctifies or sets apart. Sanctification is the act or process by which people or things are cleansed and dedicated to God ritually and morally. In the ritual understanding it is a cleansing as preparation for an encounter with God. The Holiness Code which is found in Leviticus 19 and following is a mandate for observing God's laws both ceremonial and moral.

The Hebrew root of the word *qodesh* denoting holiness appears as a verb, noun or adjective over 850 times in the Old Testament, which suggests its importance. It has the meaning of being cut off, or being separated. To be holy is to be set apart for and dedicated to the service of God. Holiness is basically applied to something or someone whom God has set apart.

Embedded in the concept of holiness in the Law and the Prophets is the idea of personal righteousness expressed in covenants being made and kept with God and within human relationships. Righteousness is understood as faithfulness in such covenant relationships. Such faithfulness would characterise the person who is holy. To be dedicated to God is to live as God desires.

b) New Testament

In the teaching of the New Testament, holiness is an attribute of God that the people of God are urged to reflect in their lives. It is a restoration of the image of God in the believer through union with Christ.

‘Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator’ (*Colossians 3:9-10*). (See also *Ephesians 5:1-2*.)

Holiness means to be at God’s disposal giving Christ-service in the world, and it is to be Christlike in character and attitudes.

The New Testament underlines the moral and relational meaning of holiness. It continues the three elements of holiness in the Old Testament with these emphases:

- i. cleansing (*Ephesians 5:26; Hebrew 9:13-14*);
- ii. dedication (*Romans 6:19; 15:16; Colossians 1:28*);
- iii. covenant faithfulness (*Hebrews 8:6-10, 17*).

For Paul sanctification is the moral equivalent (*Romans 12:1-2*) to the sacrificial offerings we meet in the Old Testament, where people or things are set aside or set apart to God. In his letters it is important that believers have been chosen for and dedicated to holiness. It is God’s will for them, and without holiness no one will see the Lord. (See also *Hebrews 12:14*.)

Sanctification is seen as the work of God the Father, of Christ and especially of the Holy Spirit. Christians are sanctified by being in Christ through regeneration and therefore Paul calls all Christians saints. ‘Saints’ is always used in the plural to indicate the relational aspect of holiness and the importance of the fellowship. Holiness is a state in which they find themselves and in which they continue to live. At the same time it is also an ongoing and future work of God, an experience they must pursue. Therefore believers are both passive and active in their sanctification.

c) Church history

In the early Church we meet a radical discipleship and a call for a holy life. There were two reasons for this. First, the gospel was understood as calling someone to live in a way that was radically different from the lives of most people. Second, there was at this time an urgency in mission, and in claiming the promises of God, as the early Christians expected the imminent return of Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God. The Church under persecution was marked by that urgency.

Early Celtic Christianity, which was nurtured in Ireland and was the most significant movement in replanting Christianity in England, Scotland, and Western Europe following the fall of the Roman Empire in the 5th century, taught a radical holiness. This was a way of life which encouraged purity alongside compassion for others and involvement in every dimension of human life.

However, as the Church became established and supported by the ruling powers of society, the urgency of the call to holiness was nearly forgotten in mainstream Christianity, though there were still small counter-cultural groups here and there claiming these promises and keeping the call to holiness alive.

As a consequence of this development holiness came to be seen as the prerogative of the elect few such as hermits, monks, nuns, mystics and the priesthood. The call to holiness did not significantly touch the laity. Holy living was expected only from those chosen to be saints on behalf of the people.

At the time of the Reformation one thing emerged which has had a profound influence on the later holiness movement and on the development of evangelical churches. That one thing was the concept of the priesthood of all believers. The reformers stressed that there were no longer two different groups of Christians: the elect, those especially called to live a holy life, a life of discipleship; and then the ordinary Christians whose main attention was to this world. All were called to discipleship, all Christians had a calling.

The Puritan and Pietist traditions in the 17th and 18th centuries focussed on holiness of life and were the foundation on which the Wesleyan Movement of the 18th century and the Holiness Movement of the 19th century were grounded.

The years leading up to the birth of The Salvation Army were marked by a great holiness revival. It began in 1858 in the USA as a prayer meeting revival, spreading to Canada and crossing the ocean to the British

Isles in 1859. Influential preachers were Charles Finney and James Caughey. The revival affected most churches from the evangelicals within the Anglican/Episcopal Church to the Methodists, the Congregationalists and the Presbyterians. It manifested itself in prayer meeting campaigns or great concerts of prayer.

Amongst the central figures in this revival was the American couple Walter C. Palmer and Phoebe Palmer, who held campaigns in Great Britain from 1859-1863. The teaching and revival meetings of this couple and the books on holiness by Phoebe Palmer were a source of inspiration for our Founders.

This great revival influenced mission initiatives to different parts of the world. The Evangelical Alliance, which had just been founded (1846), became closely linked to the holiness revival.

The Salvation Army's holiness teaching fed upon this revival, which to a great extent continued for the remainder of the century. (See Further Discussion, below.)

2. The importance of the doctrine to Christian faith

Holiness teaching is important, because it stresses the ethical and social consequences of salvation. It focusses on the grace of God as a costly grace which calls for a changed life and attitudes in us and shows us the path of discipleship. It is an optimism of grace as it points to victory over sin and rejects a life of defeat. When the teaching of holiness has gone from mere teaching to personal experience we are set free to live a life of radical discipleship.

Belief in holiness sets us in the direction recovering of the true image of God in us and developing that image. This is the recovery of the true humanity which Jesus Christ made visible in his life. The focus on holiness is a focus on the life of Christ which shapes our spirituality and leads us down a disciplined path to holiness.

3. Issues for Salvationists

In holiness teaching one finds the very essentials of salvationism, which is the intimate relationship between spirituality and service, the holy life and mission. Holiness in a Salvationist understanding expresses itself as a very practical, social holiness as well as a personal spiritual experience and development. Holiness teaching stresses the need to develop an inner personal spiritual life to feed on for living a holy life, a life in community with others and a life of restored relationships.

The implications of this understanding of holiness are far reaching. They lead to an involvement in society on many levels:

- a) direct involvement with people in their needs spiritual and practical;
- b) engagement in the fights for social justice and human rights, for example an attitude, which is reflected in our lives, against violation of human rights such as racism, ageism, sexism and sexual exploitation;
- c) awareness of the importance of an ecological balance in our surroundings, a global sharing of resources and a willingness to work towards this end;
- d) responsibility for the weak and poor, for putting the rights of children on the agenda;
- e) having a Christian world view and living by Biblical values.

4. The essentials of the doctrine

In the doctrine we find the description of how we are made whole which is a recovery of our full humanity. It points to the inseparability of salvation (being saved) and sanctification (being made holy). Holiness is a privilege of all believers, but it should not be considered as an option. It is the will of God that all his people shall experience holiness. This he also enables.

There are many different theories of what holiness means and of how it is expressed in life. Some aspects of these theories belong to the non-essentials of the doctrine. Some of them are claiming too little and some too much. Care should be taken to avoid gloomy defeatism on the one hand, and pretentious perfectionism on the other.

5 Discussion questions/exercises

- a) What are the most difficult aspects of the doctrine of holiness for you? Why do you think so?
- b) Why do you think so many Christians experience failure and frustration as they try to live a Christian life?
- c) What are the consequences of believing that your Christian pilgrimage depends on your own adequacy?
- d) Discuss holiness as an action of God and not our own accomplishment.
- e) How would you explain the Army's emphasis on holiness to a Christian friend of another tradition (a tradition that does not emphasise the call to holiness or does not see a life of holiness as a real possibility for the Christian in this life)?

6. Further discussion

a) Early Christian writings

The doctrine of holiness is very evident in the early Christian writings, such as *The Letters of Clement*, the *Shepherd Hermas*, the *Didache* and early Christian fathers such as Ignatius and Polycharp. Christians lived in a pagan environment and they were called to holiness in the midst of the world. Here they had to witness to God and glorify him by their daily behaviour.

Later as the Church became one of the power bases for society, holiness developed into a more ritualistic rather than ethical conception. As we have seen, however, radical groups and individuals kept the call to holiness alive.

b) The Middle Ages

During the Middle Ages a recovery of holiness as normative for Christian life took place. Both Bernhard of Clairvaux and Thomas Aquinas focussed on the Pauline meaning of holiness as a moral and ethical value. Francis of Assisi rediscovered holiness as a simple, but radical, lifestyle of compassion, joy and powerlessness.

Many different groups heard the call to a holy life. Among those are the Waldensians: worth mentioning as they still today are a source of inspiration. This movement was founded by Peter Waldo, a rich merchant of Lyons, who in 1173 was moved by Christ's words in *Matthew 19:21* to sell all he had and give to the poor. He sold everything and began an itinerant life together with others, preaching and calling people to discipleship. It was a revival movement of lay people. It was said of them: 'They go about in twos, barefoot, in woollen clothes, owning nothing but holding all things in common like the apostles.' After the Reformation the Waldensians became aligned with the reformed church.

Another person from the same period is Joachim of Fiore (1132-1202). His writings have inspired individuals and groups since then, amongst others the holiness movement of the 18th and 19th centuries. Joachim's concept of the eternal gospel *evangelium aeternum* as the indestructible fruit of faith, which is left after having been through the cleansing fire of the Holy Spirit, has caught the imagination of many and been a source of inspiration. This very broad concept has been filled with different meanings according to the viewpoints and beliefs of the persons or groups concerned. Linked to this concept is his division of history into three stages: the time of the Father (Old Testament times), the time of the Son (New Testament times), and the time of the Holy Spirit, which will be marked by the eternal gospel and by an overwhelming outpouring of the Spirit. This, together with his prophecies and interpretations of the book of Revelation made an impact on people in the following centuries. At times his influence seemed to disappear only suddenly to surface again.

c) The Reformation

Even though justification by faith alone was the focal point for the reformers, both Martin Luther and John Calvin pointed to the importance of holiness. As they never developed a specific theology of holiness, it has not been stressed within Lutheran and Reformed theology; nevertheless it is there. As in the doctrine of

justification the stress here is that nothing is achieved by our own accord, it is solely the work of God. Martin Luther uses *Romans 5:15* to focus on the grace and the gift as he says that the believer receives two things from God, the grace and the gift. It is the grace that forgives sin and accomplishes peace and comfort to the conscience, while the gift is the Holy Spirit who creates a new heart, mind, thoughts, and power. We receive not just forgiveness of our sins but power to abstain from sin. We must be made good in order to do good. For John Calvin sanctification is a process. In this process we are being consecrated more and more to the Lord in true purity of life by the indwelling of Christ through the Holy Spirit.

d) Pietism and Puritanism

Both the pietist and puritan traditions had a strong impact on the holiness movement. The publication of Philip Jacob Spenser's book *Pia Desideria (Pious Wishes, 1675)* inaugurated the pietist movement.

Also John Bunyan's book *The Pilgrim's Progress (1678-1684)* needs to be mentioned here, as it had a widespread influence. It influenced authors, writers, preachers, churches and individual Christians by its images and examples of Christian life.

When many puritans felt forced to leave England and settled in America, they became a major shaping force of American Christianity. The most significant American Puritan theologian was Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), who was a minister in Northampton on the Connecticut River and a central figure of great revivals in the 1730s and 1740s. What happened at these revival meetings is described in detail in his journals and in his book *The Life and Diary of David Brainers (1745)*. These were widely read, paving the way for understanding holiness as a separate experience. The same can be said of Edward's Sermon Series on *1 Corinthians 13* published in 1746 as *Charity and its Fruits*. In 1740 the Englishman George Whitefield (1714-1770) was invited to join this revival. It was later called The First Great Awakening.

At the same time on the Continent the pietists in Halle in Germany, especially Nikolaus Ludwig Graf von Zinzendorf (1700-1760), who founded the Herrnhut community, had a strong influence on the development of the holiness movement in Europe.

e) Methodism

John Wesley (1703-1790) had contact with the brethren in Halle and was greatly influenced by them. In particular the young Peter Böhler played a great part in Wesley's spiritual development leading up to what was later called his Aldersgate experience 24 May 1738. Here his doubt and fear were replaced with peace, trust and victory. It was the reading of the preface to Martin Luther's *Commentary on Romans* that captivated him that night.

John Wesley's holiness teaching was influenced by Count von Zinzendorf who stressed that sanctification as well justification is 'by faith': 'Exactly as we are justified by faith, so we are sanctified by faith'.

Concerning the doctrine of 'holiness of heart and life,' Wesley said, commenting in a letter on his gladness at hearing that a certain 'brother' had 'more light with regard to full sanctification', 'This doctrine is the grand depositum which God has lodged with the people called Methodists; and for the sake of propagating this chiefly he appeared to have raised us up.'

Wesley saw holiness or sanctification as being a part of the complete order of salvation. Its particular beginning is in regeneration or the new birth which accompanies justification. From that instantaneous work it increases gradually until another work in which the heart is cleansed from sin resulting in a heart of 'perfect love', by which Wesley meant purity of motivation or intent, a sincerity of love. There is then further increase in the sanctifying process until its completion at the believer's death or glorification.

For John Wesley sanctification expressed itself in practical ways. There was a clear ethical impulse in his holiness teaching in that the 'perfect love' which characterised his understanding of holiness included bearing the burdens of others. 'Christianity,' he said, 'is a social religion; and...to turn it into a solitary one is to destroy it.' In the sermon containing that statement he was referring to the Christian's contact as salt and light with society as a whole. But he was also careful to see that the Methodists for whom he had responsibility had the opportunity of the kind of Christian fellowship or Christian society which was necessary to sustain their spiritual life. To that end he set up three support groups for his converts – the

Society, the Band, and the Class Meeting. His instruction for such groups was: 'Strengthen you one another. Talk together as often as you can. And pray earnestly with and for one another, that you may endure to the end, and be saved'.

f) The Salvation Army

The Salvation Army's holiness teaching has from the beginning been dependent on the teaching of John Wesley. Preachers of the Great Awakening as well as the Holiness Movement leading up to the time of the birth of the Army also had an impact. But it was particularly because of William Booth's indebtedness to the teaching of John Wesley on holiness that he said: 'I worshipped everything that bore the name of Methodist. To me there was one God, and John Wesley was his prophet'.

The teaching of our Founders, William and Catherine Booth, was strong holiness teaching, as was the teaching of Bramwell Booth. Samuel Logan Brengle wrote extensively on holiness, and his life, his preaching, his teaching and most significantly his books still today are sources whereupon Salvationists feed and keep holiness teaching alive within the Army.

In the 1960's Frederick Coultts gave a renewed insight to our holiness teaching through his thinking, teaching and writings. In *The Call to Holiness* (1964) he emphasises 'Christlikeness' as his definition of holiness: 'A man's conception of holiness is governed by the character of the god he worships. Like god, like worshipper. So that, when Jesus came, enriching beyond measure our understanding of God, he also deepened beyond measure our conception of holiness. And if the call to holiness is a call to resemble God, then to be holy is to be like Jesus.'

More recently there have been Salvationist contributions to holiness teaching by Edward Read (*Studies in Sanctification*, 1975), Clarence Wiseman (*Living the Holy Life*, 1978), Bramwell Tillsley (*Life in the Spirit*, 1986), Arthur Pitcher (*Holiness in the Traffic*, 1987), John Larsson (*Spiritual Breakthrough*, 1983) and Chick Yuill (*We Need Saints*, 1988).



LIFE

1. Lifestyle and ethics

- a) What in this chapter on full salvation can you relate to your own experience?
- b) What impact does your understanding and/ or experience of holiness have on your everyday decisions and actions?
- c) Project a situation where the values of holiness clash with commonly accepted values. Identify the commonly accepted values and the holiness value involved. Some are clear cut, others are not.
- d) Case study examples:
 - i. You have been shopping in the supermarket. It was crowded and the cashier was busy. When you come home you discover that you have more money in your purse than you should. You have received more change than you were entitled to. What do you do?
 - ii. According to the law of your country you are supposed to pay tax on all income. You have an extra income which will not come to the knowledge of the tax authorities. What will you do about that? Are you going to report your income or will you ignore it?
 - iii. You discover that you are pregnant. Unfortunately you and your boyfriend are not married yet. Your country has a liberal law on abortion. Your dilemma is that you will have to step down as a soldier for a period of time when your pregnancy is discovered, and your wedding will have to be sooner than expected with not as grand a celebration as planned. If you choose an abortion nobody will know and you can avoid these consequences. But abortion is terminating a new life. How will you face the situation?

- iv. You are an employer and have 20 people employed who have been with you for a number of years. There is a recession and your firm is in financial difficulties. One solution could be to cut back on employees, but they are not young any longer and there is no work whatsoever to get in your town. Another could be to try to get through the difficulties with a very strict financial policy with the risk of having to close down the firm at some stage. This would give you a personal loss and perhaps the loss of work for all your employees. What would you do?
- v. You are working in a company which has a high profile in society partly due to the discipline and lifestyle of the people employed. For the last 10 years you have worked closely with another man who is brilliant in his field. He has had some troubles with alcohol and it is affecting his work which you try to cover-up by doing some of it yourself. The company has a very strict line on alcohol. What will you do? Continue to help your friend in his work and try to persuade him to stop drinking or tell your superiors so that they can decide what to do? You know that he might lose his job if his drinking problem is discovered, but you know as well that his drinking is harming the firm and the goodwill towards the company.
- vi. One of the most productive plants in West Africa is the palm tree. For about the first 14 years of its life, it provides palm fruit, palm oil, palm kernel oil and palm fronds for basket making. Thereafter, it becomes much less productive, but also highly costly to maintain. To keep it going is expensive. Cutting it down involves the grower in an ethical dilemma. From the liquid that drains from the fallen tree, both palm wine (fresh alcohol juice) and gin (fermented alcohol) can be derived. These can provide a good source of income, but for the Salvationist, they are clearly substances which can cause great harm to individuals and communities. Should the farmer not make use of his redundant palm tree? If he should, does the end justify the means? If he should not, must he be prepared to live more frugally than his neighbours?

2. Mission of the Church

- a) What is the connection between the Church's holiness and its Christ-service in the world?
- b) Could certain distortions or misunderstandings of holiness or holy living undermine the Church's mission? If so how?
- c) What is the relation between the healing and wholeness that takes place within the congregation (corps) and the Church's healing mission in the world?

3. Personal ministry

- a) How can I give effective witness to a life of holiness? And can I testify to it?
- b) How does growth in holiness enable/release me to use my gifts in ministry?

WORSHIP

Ideas for personal and corporate worship

- a) Read the section on 'God's gracious provision' (*Salvation Story* pages 87-89) and apply both the comfort and the challenge of the section to your personal life. Ponder how the holiness of God can be reflected in your life. Bear in mind that holiness is the work of God and that your worship should be centred upon him. Meditate in silent worship upon that.
- b) Find songs and choruses about God's holiness and of his actions that make your experience of holiness possible.
- c) Read *1 John 3:16-20*. Here is a great challenge for living a holy life, but a great comfort as well. Put your soul at rest by reflecting on these verses.

- d) Listen to music; for example, songster or band pieces of well known holiness tunes and songs. Some of you may wish to extend your music meditation with music from your own cultures or with classical pieces which for you convey the holiness of God, his presence and reality. (For example, Bach's *Canon Suite in D major for three violins and cello*, Carl Nielsen's flute piece *The fog is lifting*, Shostakovich's *Symphony No. 5 Op. 47 – Largo* are fine as meditation music.)
- e) Find a piece of art which for you reflects the sanctifying Spirit at work.
- f) Read authentic holiness writings, perhaps simple stories of holiness in action from early Army history or Church history.
- g) Make use of poetry.
- h) Use lectionaries, creeds, affirmations of faith to help you meditate on the Christian life and call to holiness. (See some of these at the end of the Study Guide.)
- i) Write down your own experience of holiness, of God's sanctifying Spirit at work in you.

BIBLE STUDIES

Work through the major sections of the chapter and read the Bible references connected to the section. What do the Scriptures teach us?

1. Continued obedient faith

Colossians 2:6-7. What does this passage teach us about making Christian pilgrimage possible?

2. God's gracious provision

1 Thessalonians 4:1-8. Using this text as a starting point discuss what God has made gracious provision for.

3. By grace through faith

Romans 8:1-11. In what way is this a challenge for your life as a Christian? What does it mean for you personally to be free from the law of sin and death?

4. A radical life-change

Philippians 1:9-11. How does the abounding love which is referred to in the text give you greater spiritual discernment? See for example *1 Corinthians 13:4-7*.

5. Lifelong process

John 15:1-7. How does the imagery of Christ as the vine and you as the branch help you to understand the nature of holiness and the process of Christian growth?

7. The restoration of the covenant, holiness and ethics

Matthew 5:43-48. How does this radical ethic of love affect the way you relate to your adversaries or those who seek to take advantage of you or harm you. An example could be hostile military action.

8. Wholeness, health and healing

James 5:13-16. What is the relationship between our experience of healing and confession of sin; ministering to one another in the fellowship; the congregation as a caring community?

9. *Sermon series suggestions*

a) **THE EXPERIENCE OF SANCTIFICATION**

To stay a Christian – continued obedient faith *Matthew 6:9-13*

The sanctifying Spirit *John 17:15-19*

God's gracious provision *1 Peter 1:13-16*

By grace through faith *Romans 8:1-11*

A radical life-change *Colossians 3:9-14*

A lifelong process *John 15:1-7*

b) **THE LIFE OF HOLINESS**

Covenantal living *Matthew 5:43-48*

Ethical living *Mark 12:28-31*

Healthy living *Revelation 22:1-2*

Missional living *Mark 2:1-12*

SALVATION STORY STUDY GUIDE

CHAPTER TEN

People of God

The doctrine of the Church

'Of This Great Church of the Living God, we claim and have ever claimed, that we of the Salvation Army are an integral part and element – a living fruit-bearing branch in the True Vine.' (Bramwell Booth)

N.B. – Before commencing on the following study guide for chapter ten of *Salvation Story*, read the chapter in the Handbook in its entirety, including each of the Scripture references.

BELIEF

1. *Historical summary*

In the **New Testament** the Church is seen as the new people of God, the New Israel. As a body this Church comprises 'a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation' that has been 'called out of darkness into his wonderful light' in order to 'declare the praises of him who called (them)' (*1 Peter 2:9*). All Christians are seen as vital parts of this people, this body, and as having a place and a calling within it. The Church is the miracle by which God in Christ takes those who 'were not a people' and transforms them into 'God's people' (*1 Peter 1:10*).

In the first two centuries of the **Early Church**, Christians understood the Church as a holy community with a radical lifestyle that did not compromise with the present world order and value system and that was persecuted for its own unwillingness to accommodate. The Church of that day can be seen as a radical alternative society warring against the principalities and powers that ruled the hearts of men and women and challenging contemporary social structures – an army committed to uncompromising obedience to Jesus Christ as Lord.

When Christianity became the 'official religion' of the Roman Empire under Constantine (4th century), it began rapidly to accommodate itself to the cultural values and practices of society and even to identify with many of them. Less and less did membership involve radical commitment. Citizenship and the state became equated with membership in the Church. Rather than being 'the sacramental community', the Church largely became 'the dispenser of sacraments'.

The pattern of the Church increasingly followed that of Roman civil government and gradually became part of its structure. This was to prove an advantage because it enabled the Church to survive the chaos of the Roman Empire's dissolution. But it also proved to be a stultifying factor because of the concentration of power and participation in the hands of a minority, the clerics, thereby severely limiting the participation of the majority of Christians in creative discipleship and leadership.

From Augustine of Hippo through the **Middle Ages** society was divided into two realms, the sacred and the secular. The Church was seen as the authority, guardian, and arbiter of the sacred realm. However, it also wielded considerable political and economic power and often became involved in the political process, sometimes strongly influencing, or even determining, the outcome. In Europe again and again there were struggles between the Church and the State over political control. At the same time, radical Christian groups, often persecuted by the established Church, sought to preserve and live by the dynamics of discipleship which they discovered in the New Testament. The early Celtic Church, for example, beginning with Patrick in Ireland, developed a spirituality of great depth that transformed pagan cultures by the power of life-affirming holiness and compassionate community.

As the Church compromised itself through accommodation to culture, political involvement, the buying and selling of offices, and the acquisition of enormous wealth, a succession of reform movements, such as the Franciscan Order, sprang up. These were movements within the Church that sought to reclaim radical discipleship, the covenant community, holiness.

The **Reformation** (16th century) sought the recovery of true Biblical spirituality. It also attempted to affirm 'the priesthood of all believers' by which all Christians are called to minister through their various vocations. Many of these Reformation churches themselves became State churches, often compromising with culture and weakening the ministry of the laity.

The **Radical Reformation** that followed upon the Reformation sought the recovery of the Church as the radical, non-accommodating community of faith. Distinct from the present world order, the Church was to give witness to the transforming power of the gospel by living as God's holy colony on earth.

The **Wesleyan Revival** saw the Church as the community of the sanctified that nurtured holiness and gave itself to mission for the world. The Church became holy as its members allowed God the Holy Spirit to sanctify them.

In the latter part of the 19th century, the first **Salvationists** understood themselves as a radical militant people of God called to holiness and holy warfare (evangelism and social involvement).

The 19th century also saw the significant expansion of world missions. Many denominations and other groups of individuals created missionary societies dedicated to bringing the gospel to non-Christian lands. A considerable degree of educational, medical, and social work was also undertaken. This became **the modern missionary movement**. It was driven by an expansionist understanding of the Church committed to evangelising and serving the world. As significant and sacrificial as many of these missions were, they often exported Western culture as well as the gospel. They sometimes encouraged dependency and paternalism. The 20th century has seen a gradual reaction away from cultural imperialism as the churches in these countries have taken control of their own destinies.

During the **20th century** church attendance in the West has declined and society has been secularised. With diminishing numbers and support, the Western church may be forced to see itself once again as a small radical community of witness. Meanwhile, in many parts of the Two-Thirds world, the Church continues to grow and free itself from the Western paternalism of earlier years.

Another significant phenomenon of the latter part of the 20th century has been the immigration of African, Asian, West Indian, and South American peoples to Western nations. This has created two new opportunities for Christian mission. First, Western Christians have undertaken cross-cultural mission with these groups, often with great success. Second, Christians from within the immigrant groups themselves are increasingly evangelising others in the West.

2. The importance of the doctrine to Christian faith

The doctrine of the Church seeks to keep us faithful to the scriptural understanding of human life as **life in community**. We are who we are as members of the body of Christ. We have no identity otherwise. We discover who we are, what our gifts are, and what our mission is within the context of the Christian community.

All of us need a community where we can be at home, where we can find roots, place and belonging. It is the Church, and not a highly individualistic Christianity, that responds to these needs. The gospel offers the world true community in Christ, and guards against destructive, presumptuous, self-centred individualism. We need a doctrine of the Church that will give us the foundations for this understanding of community.

God calls a **people**. He calls individuals in relation to a people, a community of faith or a group that God is inviting to become a community of faith. Our callings have meaning as part of the Church and its mission.

The Church is a **demonstration community** which gives proof to the reality and power of reconciliation through Christ. It demonstrates the positive alternatives to relationships and societies that are built upon power, competition, conformity and repression. It demonstrates the life to which we are called by God and without which life is not human in the true biblical sense.

The Church is the **guardian of the faith**. It is the purveyor of Christian teaching and the keeper of the treasury of the Christian story. As such, it insures the orthodox faith and discerns heresy.

We must recognise, however, that the Church has sometimes been, and still can be, corrupted, and it has not always played the role of guardian of the faith well – in fact, has on occasion done the very opposite. The community of all believers must accept its responsibility to ensure the integrity of the Church, which is accountable to God through the judgment of Scripture.

3. Issues for Salvationists

Many would agree that it is time we began teaching this doctrine in the Army. We have come to a time in our history when we need to understand **the corporate dimension of our faith**, understand how important the body of Christ is to us and give attention to the important role the Church – most particularly The Salvation Army – plays in our own nurture, spiritual formation, Christian education, and spiritual gift development.

As we seek to realise community in Christ, there are key issues worth giving attention to, such as: How effectively do we nurture reconciliation, holiness, and health within the body of Christ, the corps fellowship? Are there important matters we need to address in order to keep the body of Christ spiritually healthy?

Consider how effectively your corps is nurturing good disciples of Christ. Are there steps for improvement that need to be taken?

It would also be very helpful, and illuminating, to consider what truths and values we actually celebrate when we come together in praise, worship, and fellowship. How Christian-based is our worship? Do we take advantage of ‘sacramental opportunities’ in our worship and in our life together? What are the focal points of our times of fellowship together?

In some parts of the world where the Army ministers, there is pressure from other denominations, and sometimes from certain persons within the Army, to reconsider re-instituting one or both of the Protestant sacraments. The Army holds the view that as all of life is sacramental, so is all of worship. Salvationists have the liberty to explore all means by which grace can be received and celebrated. (See the International Spiritual Life Commission Report, page 129.)

Do we sometimes approach our Salvationist witness and mission in the world as separate activities, rather than seeing them as part of the life of the whole body of Christ? Would our witness and mission actually improve if we developed some deeper understanding of our calling and our life together as the body of Christ? Would we be more effective if we saw ourselves as the Body of Christ, partnering together, working together as a team, resourcing one another by sharing our gifts and resources?

Consider our Army government. Our form of church government is similar to the military. In actuality it is one expression of the form of church government known as episcopacy, where authority at a given level resides in one person, a ‘bishop’ or ‘overseer’ (Greek *episcopos*). Using the term ‘bishop’ in the generic sense, who the bishop is depends upon the level being considered. On the local level the ‘bishop’ is the corps officer, on the divisional level the divisional commander, etc. What are the strengths and weaknesses of this particular form of church government? Are there any changes or modifications of our form of church government that we ought to be contemplating for the good of our mission or the spiritual maturity of our corps?

Consider the matter of our relationship to other churches and denominations. In what senses are we one with them, and in what senses are we distinct? Is ecumenical cooperation desirable? If so, how do we partner with other churches or Christian groups without losing our distinctiveness or our effectiveness?

4. The essentials of the doctrine

- a) First, **it is essential simply to have a doctrine of the Church**. We Salvationists must understand that all Christians are a part of the body of Christ and play an important role in its life and mission. From a New Testament perspective, we understand ourselves as Christians, and we cannot live our lives as Christians, outside the one body. The Church is essential to the Christian life.
- b) Although the Church is part of the culture around it, it must understand itself to be a radically different kind of community, one that stands over against and often opposes the allegiances, values, and lifestyles of contemporary culture. It must not itself accommodate and compromise its own holiness; it must live in the freedom of Christ and not become enslaved to the present world order. This is the second essential

aspect of the doctrine: **the Church must relate the gospel message to the hopes, needs and life struggles of those in the culture, without losing its prophetic edge or weakening the integrity of its witness.** It must seek to be culturally relevant without compromising the gospel and its values.

- c) The third essential aspect is that **the Church must be a community of reconciliation.** It is crucial that we see the Church from the New Testament perspective as the community of those who have found forgiveness, the peace of Christ, new life free of the destructive forces of hostility. The Church is where the disconnection caused by sin is being healed. It is important that Salvationists take their calling to community seriously and that they take the risk of living their lives together as if the 'dividing walls of hostility' really were no more.

It is important, therefore, that all Christians affirm that we are one in Christ. This oneness has to do with the essentials of our common faith, our love for one another, our shared call to holiness, and our united commitment to mission. This unity must be affirmed within each congregation, within the denomination, and within the true Church.

- d) Fourth, **our doctrine of the Church must affirm unity in diversity.** Within the unity of the body of Christ, we become willing to express and celebrate our diversity in personalities, gifts, methods, cultural expressions, and points of view.
- e) Fifth, **our understanding of the Church must keep each of two important kinds of activities in perspective.** These two kinds of activities can be described as '**gathering**' and '**scattering**'. The gathering activities of the Church are crucial. God's people need to come together to be nurtured, encouraged, and equipped for ministry and mission. Worshipping God, learning in community, and helping one another to develop their spiritual gifts are essential to the life of the Church. The primary purposes of the gathering are both to worship God and to carry our his mission in the world. The Church gathers together in order to receive the presence of God and to prepare and equip itself to be scattered in the world as a leavening influence, a courageous witness, an evangelistic mission and a compassionate servant.

5. Discussion questions and exercises

- a) Write down at least 10 ways the New Testament describes the Church or a congregation (for example, 'body', 'royal priesthood'). Which ones best describes your corps, or what your corps aspires to become? What steps can be taken to bring your corps closer to the spiritual reality to which these word pictures point? Which picture most challenges you at this point in the life of your corps?
- b) Think of your corps as a human body. List the roles that various members/soldiers/adherents play in helping the body to function. Who in the body, whose contribution is still needed, has yet to find their role, and what part do you think they might be gifted to play?
- c) Discuss the strengths of your corps fellowship. Discuss the areas that it would be particularly helpful to strengthen in order for your corps to fulfill its purpose and mission. (Note: It is not important that a corps be strong everywhere. Every corps is different, as is every body, in how it looks, how it works together, and what its particular gifts and competencies are in carrying out the great commission.)

6. Further discussion

The study of the doctrine of the Church is called *ecclesiology*. The term comes from the Greek word *ekklesia* (the church) and *logos* (word, mind, or doctrine). The word *ekklesia* is comprised of two other Greek words: *ek* (out of) and *kaleo* (I call). The word was used in the pre-Christian period to indicate the summons of an army for battle. It was later used for the duly-constituted assembly of free citizens for the self-governing of their city.

In the New Testament and in the early Church, writers were looking for the right word to describe the fellowship of believers. They chose the term *ekklesia* over the Jewish term *sunagoge* (from *sunagein*, meaning 'to bring together'). Perhaps the choice is significant. Evidently, the 'being called out' was seen as more decisive than the 'bringing together'.

If we were to ask which has been the greater emphasis in the Army's self-understanding – the gathering or the scattering – we would have to say the scattering. The Army has almost always thought of itself more in terms of

mission rather than fellowship. We came into existence precisely at a time when the Church seemed overall to be in retreat, especially among the marginalised. The Army saw itself as an invading evangelical force called out of the comfort and introspection of mainline Christianity.

It is quite clear that the early Salvationists did not see themselves to be engaged in the business of creating another church or denomination. At least those terms would certainly not have been used. They carried too many unwanted connotations, such as: a lack of concern for a largely unsaved world (especially the poor and working classes), materialism, compromised living, complacency, unwillingness to adapt to the needs of other classes and cultural groups. What the early Army leaders first created is what we would today call a *parachurch* (*para*, beside, alongside), that is, a group or agency that serves alongside the churches and carries out a specific mission about which it is very passionate and for which it is especially equipped. They created an agency to evangelise the poor and working classes.

The problem with this mission was that the persons evangelised needed a 'church home', a fellowship of believers in which to be nurtured, disciplined, trained and encouraged. Most of the church congregations proved unable to accommodate to the culture of poverty and provide the needed support. The converts returned to the Army and made it their spiritual home. Thus the Army became a home for these new Christians, and while this was not its original intention, that intention could not have been fulfilled without taking this step. Unless persons evangelised have a community of faith which serves as their spiritual support system, their conversions will probably be short-lived. In reality, the Army became a church, one with a missional emphasis.

Over the years, many within our movement have been very reluctant to call the Army a church. In the quote by Bramwell Booth at the beginning of the chapter, the second General goes so far as to claim that the Army is 'an integral part and element – a living fruit-bearing branch' of the true Church, but he stops short of calling us 'a church'. As a parachurch we certainly saw ourselves as 'an arm of the Church', and many churches today who are familiar with our social work, perhaps even our evangelistic work, but are largely ignorant of our congregational life, still see us that way. Our non-practice of the sacraments also makes it difficult, sometimes impossible, for us to gain recognition by certain governments as a duly constituted 'church' or 'religious sect'. On the other hand, in some countries public as well as private funding could be jeopardized by our too strongly claiming full status as a church.

Yet most Salvationists today would undoubtedly claim that we are more than a mere arm of the Church. They would claim that we are certainly a part of the one true Church. But are we *a* church? Are we a distinct but fully authentic and adequate fellowship within the spectrum of Christian denominations? Certainly the answer to the last question is Yes, even if there is still some nervousness about the term 'church'. The international mission statement of The Salvation Army (first published in *The Salvation Army Year Book* of 1994) defines The Salvation Army as follows:

The Salvation Army, an international movement, is an evangelical part of the universal Christian Church.

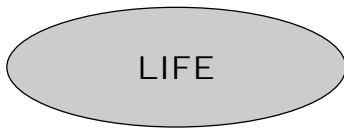
Its message is based on the Bible. Its ministry is motivated by love for God. Its mission is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and meet human needs in his name without discrimination.

For some, the term 'church' connotes a lifeless form of Christianity, a ritualistic, self-absorbed religious establishment. It may also be used to refer to the institutional expression of Christianity, the structure and its processes. Others may see churches as voluntary associations of like-minded people who choose to join together for worship, instruction, evangelism, discipling, in ways consistent with their own preferences and convictions. None of these views, of course, expresses the New Testament concept of a people called by God to be *his* people and to carry out *his* mission in the world. If we Salvationists could define 'church' in this way, most would undoubtedly claim the term. They would say that The Salvation Army is a church that is:

- a) **Biblically orthodox** (We claim that none of our tenets deviate from Scripturally supported and universally accepted creeds.)
- b) **Non-sectarian** (We were not established to further some off-centre doctrines or practices. Our doctrines claim to be ecumenical, and our practices consistent with Scriptural teaching.)
- c) **Missional** (We came into being to further Christ's mission in the world. We are ex-centric.)

Do we Salvationists today need to develop a clearer understanding of what the Church actually is? Are there reasons to include ecclesiology in our doctrinal studies? A number of reasons for doing so could be given:

- a) **Our calling as a movement.** We need to understand it better in order to have the needed clarity and focus. We need to keep in touch with why our movement was called into being and to ask the hard questions about our continuing faithfulness to our mission.
- b) **Our life together as a people of God.** Our Eleven Articles do not include a doctrine of the Church. In this overly-individualised, alienated world, we need to demonstrate how redemption through Christ changes the way we live together in community and how the body of Christ expresses the life of the Kingdom of God.
- c) **Our holiness doctrine.** We need to do it justice. The call to holy living includes, and cannot do without, the call to community. (Wesley: 'no holiness but social'.) Holiness has a community dimension to it, and our doctrine of holiness is inadequate if it is divorced from the community context of Church and world.
- d) The importance of **stating clearly who we are.** There are differing understandings of what the Army is, not only outside our ranks, but sometimes within them. We need the clarity about our identity and our mission without which we cannot be effective.



1. Lifestyle and ethics

- a) Discuss important ways in which your experiences as a participant in the body of Christ, the fellowship of believers, has had a significant impact on your life.
- b) Discuss what actions can be taken to 'build up and strengthen the body of Christ' in your setting.
- c) What role has your corps, or some other Christian group or community, played in shaping your values? Is there a need for improved discipling in this area in your faith community?
- d) Case studies:
 - i. You are on a lunch break with a work partner. She says she is a Christian, has an experience of salvation through Christ, and believes the Bible, but does not attend a church. She says that the church is full of hypocrites who undercut one another and live differently from what they profess. She says she does not wish to be associated with those kinds of people and that she is happier to practise her faith in private, in her own way. She is clearly seeking approval from you for her decision not to be involved in a church. What do you say to her? How would you build a case for showing that participation in the body of Christ is essential for the Christian life?
 - ii. A fair number of visitors come to your corps meetings, and some of them come under the conviction of the Holy Spirit and come forward for salvation. They continue to attend for a short period of time and then fall away. Your corps has a very good band and songster brigade, but not many other active groups or opportunities for expression. Give an analysis of this situation from the standpoint of the Church as a participatory body. Refer to helpful guidance from Scripture passages such as *Romans 12:3-8*; *1 Corinthians 12:4-31*. Then make suggestions about steps that could be taken to improve the situation by better incorporating and mobilising the new converts. Also indicate how an understanding of the Church as taught in the New Testament validates your analysis and recommendations.

2. The Mission of the Church

a) Mission and maturity

- i. What effect or influence does the life, health and wholeness of your corps have on the effectiveness of its mission? Be specific.

- ii. What effect does a corps' mission have on its life, health and wholeness as a body of believers?

b) Effectiveness

- i. What are the most effective ways in which your corps is in mission, reaching the community for Christ through evangelism and/or social service/action?
- ii. There is a danger of a corps seeing its fellowship as a 'shell' insulating it from an unredeemed society. To what extent does this description characterise your corps, if at all? Discuss ways in which your corps' involvement with the unconverted can be used both to win converts and to redeem or challenge social structures that work in ways that are contrary to God's will?

c) Positioned to move

Discuss ways in which your corps may be positioned to:

- i. evangelise
- ii. serve those in need
- iii. help persons realise their hope through Christ
- iv. give prophetic witness on behalf of justice and liberty.

3. Personal ministry

- a) Where does your own giftedness and calling fit into the ministry and mission of your corps?
- b) Our understanding of our Christian identity means, among other things, that we live and minister as part of the body of Christ, and not in isolation. What effect does this fact have on your own ministry? What does it mean for you that you are always in partnership with others as you serve Christ?
- c) How does your understanding of the body of Christ help you to approach your corps ministries as cooperative ventures with all brothers and sisters in Christ in local churches and not as a competitive enterprise seeking success only for the Army? What are the inevitable consequences of 'ministry' undertaken for purposes of the self-advancement of one's own denomination?



WORSHIP

Suggestions for personal and corporate worship

Use the section and sub-section headings in chapter 10 of *Salvation Story* as the focus either of your personal worship or of a public worship series covering 15 or more meetings.

1. Personal worship

- a) Meditate on the Scripture passages listed at the end of the section or sub-section.
- b) Express gratitude for the benefits described by the passages.
- c) Ask the Lord to reveal how you can better claim one of these benefits for yourself.
- d) You may also want to pray a prayer of confession where the Holy Spirit has brought conviction over failure to claim one of his benefits.
- e) Pray for specific members of your corps fellowship about whom you are concerned.
- f) Pray for your corps as one body, asking that the Lord will fulfill his purpose for its life and its mission.

- g) You may want to use appropriate songs in your worship that will be of help. Here are some examples from the Salvation Army Songbook:

3	All people that on earth do dwell
59	I know thee who thou art
95	Blessèd are the pure in heart
438	Love divine, all loves excelling
530	Though in declaring Christ to the sinner
561	Blessèd and glorious King
576	God of comfort and compassion
577	God of grace and God of glory
593	Jesus, give thy blood-washed Army
604	Jesus, where'er thy people meet
611	Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy
613	Make me aware of thee, O Lord
648	Where lowly spirits meet
659	Blest be the dear uniting love
660	Blest be the tie that binds
662	Help us to help each other. Lord
682	Forward! be our watchword
690	Onward, Christian soldiers
769	What a work the Lord has done
789	Lord of life and love and power
833	We have caught the vision splendid
915	And are we yet alive?
919	O Saviour, now to thee we raise
938	Heavenly Father, thou hast brought us
940	Christ is our corner-stone
941	Lord of Heaven and earth and sea
943	O God of love eternal
946	Thy presence and thy glories, Lord

2. Corporate worship

- Plan a series of meetings around the various themes of the Church contained in chapter 10.
- Utilise some of the ideas contained in 1 above.
- Sermons** can focus on the themes or be based upon certain of the corresponding Scripture passages provided in the chapter.
- Different members of the corps can be asked to provide a worship centre for each service, providing visual focus on the meeting's theme. (A worship centre is a physical focal point, usually near the front of the hall, which helps the congregation to visualise important elements of the service. For example, a service focussing on the Church as a place of healing could have illustrations of healing ministries, or perhaps a display of symbols or instruments of healing.)

BIBLE STUDIES

Centre your Bible study on each theme of chapter 10 around the Bible passages referenced at the end of each section or sub-section. Ask yourself whether, in fact, the passages do lead to the assertions and affirmations in that section or sub-section. Make notes of your conclusions to share with a study group, a friend, etc.

Below is a selected passage from each section or sub-section with suggested exploratory question(s).

1. The body of Christ. *Ephesians 4:4-6, 15-16*

Why all the 'ones' (vv. 4-6)? What does this passage teach us about the absolute essentials of our calling as Christians, about the things over which no exceptions can be made? Why are these 'ones' important?

What is it that holds the body of Christ, the Church – or specifically, your corps – together? (vv 15-16) How is your corps built up?

2. The people of God. *1 Peter 2:9-10*

What is the importance of Peter identifying his readers corporately, as one people? How can an entire group have the characteristics required? What is the connection between the readers' identity and their mission?

3. The community of reconciliation. *Ephesians 2:11-22*

What was the situation in the Ephesian church to which this passage was directed? (See, for example, *Acts 15*.)

What is the connection between reconciliation with God and reconciliation in a community?

What are the 'dividing walls of hostility' we face in the Church today? In your corps?

4. The continuing community. *John 17:20-26*

Why did Jesus pray 'that they may be one, as we are one'? What was this unity of his Church through the ages that he considered so important? What are the consequences when it is seriously undermined?

5. The community gathered for fellowship. *Acts.2:42-47*

Notice how much time the early disciples spent together. Make a list of what they did when they were together. Using this list as a guide, evaluate the strengths of your own corps fellowship, affirm the strengths that currently exist, decide on those areas of the life of your corps that could be further grown forward and come up with some specific suggestions of how this could be done.

6. The community scattered for evangelism and social action. *Acts 8:1b,4; 9:36-42*

Notice how the early disciples took opportunities to spread the good news of the Christian way in both words and deeds, deeds both ordinarily loving and also miraculous, as well as in prayer.

What form would such activity take in your own corps? Develop some ideas.

7. The healing community. *James 5:13-20*

What are the essentials of the healing process within the congregation as described in this passage?

Do you think this process generally describes the healing process for many or most forms of illness or disease (physical, emotional, relational, spiritual) within a congregation?

Which aspect of this healing process would you like to see your corps strengthen?

8. The nurturing community. *Colossians 3:12-17*

List the means of Christian nurture described or mentioned in this passage. Evaluate the nurturing that takes place in your own corps by these categories. Which means of nourishment would you like to see strengthened?

List the means of mutual encouragement described in this passage. Which one would you personally like to see developed in your own corps?

9. The equipping community. *Acts 6:1-6; Romans 12:3-21; 1 Corinthians 7:7; 12:4-11; Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Peter 4:7-11*

These passages describe some of the key gifts of individuals within the Church, but much of what they say about these particular gifts certainly applies to all gifts and callings in the fellowship. What do they teach us about the immediate purpose of the exercise of our gifts? What do they teach us about the ultimate purpose of the exercise of our gifts?

10. The sacramental community. *Hebrews 12:1-3,25-29*

What does this passage teach us about Christ as the source and sign (sacrament) of God's grace?

How does worship point to the Kingdom that cannot be shaken? How does it honour Christ?

11. **The celebrating community.** *Amos 5:21-24; John 13:1-20*

According to *Amos 5:21-24*, what is it that makes our worship an abomination to God? According to *John 13:1-20*, by what attitudes and actions do we best celebrate the presence of Christ?

12. **The witnessing community.** *Matthew 9:35 – 10:16*

In what way is the witness of Jesus a model for our own witness? (*9:35-38*)

What are the essentials for witnessing? (*10:1-16*)

What does a comparison of *Matthew 10:5-6* with *Acts 1:8* tell you:

- a) about the widening scope of Christ's mission to the whole world (*Acts 1:8*), and
- b) about the wisdom of concentrating evangelistic endeavours on your peer group as a priority mission (*Matthew 10:5-6*)?

13. **The missional community.** *Matthew 25:31-46; 2 Timothy 4:1-5*

What does *Matthew 25:31-46* teach us about our motivation in mission?

What does *2 Timothy 4:1-5* teach us about what we should expect when we witness? About what we are up against?

14. **The community renewed for the future.** *Jeremiah 31:1-14; Romans 8:18-39*

In what sense has the future envisioned in *Jeremiah 31:1-14* been realised in the coming of Christ?

In what sense, according to *Romans 8:18-39*, is it yet to come?

SALVATION STORY STUDY GUIDE

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Kingdom of the risen Lord

The doctrine of Last Things

Related Doctrine

We believe in the immortality of the soul; in the resurrection of the body; in the general judgment at the end of the world, in the eternal happiness of the righteous; and in the endless punishment of the wicked.

N.B. – Before commencing on the following study guide for chapter eleven of *Salvation Story*, read the chapter in the Handbook in its entirety, including each of the Scripture references.

BELIEF

1. Historical summary

The belief we hold concerning last things is based on God's power, on his justice and on his love as these have been revealed through Jesus Christ and through the Biblical message.

a) Old Testament background

In the Old Testament the main focus is on this present life, and not very much thought is given to a life hereafter until fairly late in the Old Testament time. The Kingdom of God or the kingship of God was to take place in this world.

The root of a later belief in the resurrection in the Old Testament is the faith that as God masters life he masters death. The belief is strong that as God has created he can recreate. (*1 Samuel 2:6; Deuteronomy 32:39; Isaiah 25:8*)

See now that I myself am he! There is no God besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no-one can deliver from my hand. (*Deuteronomy 32:39*)

The earliest texts which envision a real resurrection of the righteous and a belief that God will overcome death for ever are found in *Isaiah chapters 24-27*. (See also *Daniel 12:1-3*.)

But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead (*Isaiah 26:19*).

The place for the dead was Sheol which in its essence is 'non-life' or the opposite of life. Man was created as a wholeness of body and soul and in this wholeness he died. Sheol was the final abode for the dead as Hades was in Greek mythology. Because of this similarity the word for Sheol was translated into Hades in the Septuagint (a Greek translation of the Old Testament from around 200 BC) and from this the name Hades appears in the New Testament as a provisional place for the ungodly.

In the Hellenistic period (between the Old Testament and the New) as the nation suffered political martyrdom, a belief in a life hereafter developed to protect the righteousness of God. God's suffering

people would be vindicated in a future place of justice. This included a place of judgment. The place was called Gehenna.

In the Old Testament the Valley of Ben Hinnom (Gehenna) marked the border between the Judah and Benjamin tribes and after the captivity it marked the north border of Judah. This valley was the scene of worship of the Canaanite gods Molech and Baal. Jeremiah especially paints in vivid pictures what was happening there. The worship involved sacrifices of children who passed through fire into the hands of the gods (*Jeremiah 7:31; 19:4-5; 32:35*).

This developed to a metaphorical understanding of Gehenna, translated Hell, as the place of judgment by fire for all wicked. By the time of Jesus it had become an ever-burning garbage dump. There are 12 references in the New Testament, most of them in the Gospel of Matthew (*Matthew 5:22,29-30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15,33*) but in Mark there are three as well (*Mark 9:43,45,47*) and one in Luke (*Luke 12:5*).

Jesus took this concept seriously, as can be seen in New Testament references such as this one:

If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell (Gehenna). And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell. (*Matthew 5:29-30*)

Gehenna was considered to be the place of the wicked after the final judgment. It was an everlasting fiery punishment of the wicked, also awaiting the devil and his angels. The fire would never be quenched.

b) New Testament background

i. Resurrection

The central focus of the New Testament is the resurrection of Jesus Christ with the consequences of that event for us. Something new has happened which means that the Kingdom (or kingship reign) of God has come. Central in the preaching of Jesus was the proclamation of the Kingdom of God. 'The time has come... the Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news' (*Mark 1:15*). The Kingdom was coming near, but was not yet here in its full capacity – that was to be awaited at the end of time.

The resurrection of Jesus showed the kingship of God as a power which was present in the lives of Christians. It altered them and changed their outlook. The weak and fearful disciples became strong witnesses because they lived in the reality of this power. They longed for and expected the return of Christ when that power would be unfolded in its fullness.

The disciples awaited the return of Christ in their own lifetime (*1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11*). It was a cause of bewilderment when this did not happen. Paul deals with this problem in *2 Thessalonians 1-2* and encourages the Christians in Thessalonica not to believe in rumours and speculations:

Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. Don't let anyone deceive you in any way (*2 Thessalonians 2:1-3*).

The early Christians had the sure conviction that they would soon be with Christ either by his immediate return or by themselves dying into Christ. This they held on to and by this conviction they faced persecution and martyrdom. They knew they did not die into nothing: they died into Christ. They believed that as Jesus had been raised from the dead so would they be raised.

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive (*1 Corinthians 15:20-22*).

In its fullest sense resurrection is God's raising of persons from the realm of the dead to a new and unending life in his presence. It is an event leading to a state of clarity, fullness of life and total communion with God.

Now we see but a poor reflection; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known (*1 Corinthians 13:12*).

Comprehending the belief in the resurrection of the body is difficult and has always been so. Throughout Church history people have tried to explain the unexplainable. Paul does so in *1 Corinthians 15:35-45*:

So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory, it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body (*1 Corinthians 15:42-44*).

Around 300 AD Methodius of Olympus gave this explanation in a dialogue with a certain Aglaophon:

So it seems that it is as if some skilled artificer had made a noble image, cast in gold or other material, which was beautifully proportioned in all its features. Then the artificer suddenly notices that the image had been defaced by some envious person, who could not endure its beauty, and so decided to ruin it for the sake of the pointless pleasure of satisfying his jealousy. So the craftsman decides to recast this noble image. Now notice, most wise Aglaophon, that if he wants to ensure that this image, on which he has expended so much effort, care and work, will be totally free from defect, he will be obliged to melt it down, and restore it to its former condition....Now it seems to me that God's plan was much the same as this human example....God dissolved humanity once more into its original materials, so that it could be remodelled in such a way that all its defects could be eliminated and disappear. Now the melting down of a statue corresponds to the death and dissolution of the human body, and the remoulding of the material to the resurrection after death.

Believers are resurrected to immortality, which in the New Testament is more frequently referred to as eternal life. Resurrection is the means of receiving immortality. The believer is raised to a state of immortality. We were created *for* immortality, not *with* immortality. We receive immortality as a divine gift (*Romans 2:7*) and will be immortal through grace. It is a future inheritance not a present possession. 'He can clothe our mortality with immortality' (*1 Corinthians 15:53*).

Dying into God is not to be understood as a separation of body and soul, but as an act of the whole person in which we are graciously judged, purified, healed and so illuminated and perfected – by God himself. (Hans Küng, *Credo*)

Resurrection to eternal life is a privilege reserved for the righteous, not a right for all or a general property of the human soul. (See *Romans 2:6-7,10; 1 Corinthians 15:23, 42, 52-54*.)

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed – in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality (*1 Corinthians 15:52-53*).

ii. Judgment

There will be a judgment day, but judgment does not only happen in the future. It is already present (*John 3:18; 5:24; 12:31; 16:11; 1 Corinthians 11:29,32*).

Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son (*John 3:18*).

On the judgment day all will be raised to judgment that leads either to life in abundance or to eternal death. If Heaven is to see God and to live in perfect communion, then Hell is to be barred from seeing God and to be in total isolation, a living death:

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him (*John 3:36*).

2. The importance of the doctrine

We live in a time when there is a rejection of the reality of death at least within western cultures. There is an expectation that there will be a cure of every illness and frailty and that life can be extended endlessly. Death has been institutionalised or hospitalised and by that to a certain extent hidden. It is not a natural part of life any longer as many people have never been present at the moment of death for their loved ones or seen a dead person or taken care of a dead body. At the same time the media revels in death 'pornography' showing pictures of maimed and tortured bodies, of violence leading to death, or focussing on funerals exposing people's grief as if it was a show piece. The doctrine is vital because it points to death as a reality and then looks beyond death.

The importance of the doctrine is seen and experienced as it answers crucial questions which face every human being: What is the meaning of life? Is there anything on the other side of death? How do I cross over from life to death? Is there anything which can carry me through death? Do I face death on my own?

The answers are that in Christ we die into God and in the presence of God, and that death is the gateway into the fullness of life in the Kingdom of God. The 11th doctrine, fully understood, gives perspective to all we do and what we are. Our choices in life have eternal consequences, therefore everything shall be decided upon in the light of the Kingdom of God.

3. Issues for Salvationists

In our Salvationist faith and practice the wholeness of the person is crucial. It is reflected in the combination of our evangelical and social work. The doctrine underlines this wholeness as we believe in a resurrection of our total being. There are many different beliefs in life after death which Salvationists will meet. There is always the danger that alien beliefs reflecting the 'spirit of the time' can slip unnoticed into Christian belief. This could be the case with, for example, the belief in reincarnation which undermines our trust in the grace of God given unconditionally and in resurrection as a creative act of God. Therefore it is vital to keep the focus on resurrection and accountability. Resurrection underlines the wholeness, the reality of death, the one life we have as a gift from God and for which we are accountable now and on the judgement day.

This doctrine helps us to get our perspectives right. Because of our deep involvement with social questions and work our focus can easily be limited to the matters of this world, but this doctrine broadens our horizon and gives an eternal aspect to all we do and are. It urges us to evangelism.

Salvationists believe in the perfection of individuals in Glory as part of a redeemed human society. This is nothing less than belief in the resurrection of Christ, for the redeemed society is no other than the glorified body of Christ (*Romans 8:9-17; John 14:1-4; Hebrews 2:10-13; Revelation 21:1-7*). That is why our resurrection, like our present salvation, is more than individual. It is all of that, there is no loss of personal identity or integrity, but it is more than that. For it is effectively personal in the context of redeemed human society, that is as part of the glorified body of Christ, the Church triumphant.

4. The essentials of the doctrine

The essential of the doctrine is the hope it transmits, a hope that transcends the border between life and death. The gospel is a gospel of hope for redemption now and in eternity.

Belief in the resurrection, in eternal life, in ultimate accountability is essential. It gives value, dignity and meaning to life and to us as individual persons. It gives us a vision extending beyond the limits of time.

To know that we ourselves live under judgment will shape our attitude towards others as well as our judgment of them. In *Romans 2*, Paul focusses on this fact. God judges us all by the light we have and on the truth of Christ.

You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same thing (*Romans 2:1*).

This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares (*Romans 2:16*).

5. Discussion Questions/Exercises

- a) How do you think the answers the doctrine gives can satisfy the questions of people today on the meaning of life and death?
- b) How would you explain the resurrection of the body to your friends?
- c) Read page 116 of *Salvation Story*. Do all the vivid pictures of the Bible describing the Kingdom of God have any meaning for you? If so, which ones make most sense? Most of them are social in character. Does that satisfy you as an individual?
- d) Have you ever encountered death at close hand involving one of your loved ones or friends or colleagues? If so, what aspect of our belief has been the most comforting? Most challenging?
- e) Do you think that the Christian hope gives special value to living, to enjoying life and to retaining the will to live?

6. Further discussion

a) Kingdom of God

The expression 'the Kingdom of God' does not occur in the Old Testament, but the notion of God as king is pervasive, and his kingly control encompasses past, present and future (*Psalms 145:13*). In the midst of national disaster and exile, the prophets announce a time when God will manifest himself as king. This great future, realised through the ministry of the Messiah will mean salvation and blessing for all nations (*Isaiah 2:1-4; 11:49; 40:10; 49:7; 52:7; Micah 4:1-5*).

In the New Testament the term 'the Kingdom of God' or 'the Kingdom of Heaven' occurs frequently and is a central theme in the proclamation of Jesus. The Greek word *basileia* is translated as kingdom and can through that translation transmit something static, while a more dynamic sense would come through when it is translated rule, reign, kingship. What Jesus announces is the realisation of Israel's hope, that the new and final order of history has arrived with him.

The Kingdom is also future. It is:

- i. distant future at the time of the final judgment (*Matthew 8:11-12; 13:39-50; 25:31-41*)
- ii. immediate future arriving through the death and resurrection of Christ (*Matthew 17:9; Mark 9:9*).

It is important to see the aspect of the 'already, but not yet' in the announcement of the Kingdom.

The Kingdom of God is a present reality as well. It is not two kingdoms, but the one, eschatological Kingdom arriving in successive stages.

That present reality of the Kingdom of God is particularly emphasised in the teachings of John Wesley and subsequently by William Booth for The Salvation Army. As an evangelist Wesley was concerned for the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth as he preached the gospel of salvation by faith. As individual lives were transformed by the grace of God, they would experience the life of the Kingdom in the present.

'The Kingdom of Heaven, and the Kingdom of God, are but two phrases for the same thing. They mean, not merely a future happy state in Heaven, but a state to be enjoyed on earth....subjects were to be gathered to God by his Son and a society to be formed, which was to subsist first on earth, and afterwards with God in Glory.' (Wesley's Comment on *Matthew 3:2* in *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*)

But in Wesley's view the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth went beyond the internal religion of those who accepted his kingship and rule in their hearts. That acceptance entailed an outward expression

of love which would have an impact on the world at large as followers of Christ fulfilled his ideal for them to be the 'salt of the earth'. In commenting on that phrase of *Matthew 5:13*, Wesley says that we are to season whatever is round about us with the 'divine savour' which is in us.

The Christian is to have an impact on society at large and thus contribute to the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth beyond that reign of God which is inward in his or her own relationship with the divine. Wesley includes the social dimension of grace and the teaching of holiness in his preaching and practice. Social action and social reform become essential to his evangelism, for in his view, solitary religion is not to be found in the gospel of Christ, nor is there a solitary holiness that excludes the social dimension: 'The gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness but social holiness.'

b) The resurrection of the body

Belief in the totality of human life is grounded in biblical anthropology and in Judaism. This was the foundation for belief in the resurrection of the body. It is that belief as well as belief in everlasting life which were preached by the early Christians and which were reflected in the Classical Creeds.

The Holy Spirit is closely associated with the believer's resurrection, as he is 'the Spirit of life' (*Romans 8:2*) and the one who imparts life (*2 Corinthians 3:6*). For Paul, the Spirit is the pledge and means of a future resurrection, and the one who sustains resurrection life (*Romans 8:10-11; 2 Corinthians 5:5; 13:4; Ephesians 1:13-14*).

The resurrected body is of divine origin, it is a spiritual body. This does not mean that it is composed of spirit but that it is animated and guided by the Spirit (*1 Corinthians 15:44, 46*). It is imperishable, glorious, powerful and free from sickness and decay (*1 Corinthians 15:42-43*).

c) The immortality of the soul

When Christianity spread in the Hellenistic world and here met an anthropology which was based on Greek dualism, a new way of thinking came into Christianity. In Greek thinking man is not perceived as a oneness, a whole as in the Biblical thinking, but as a dualistic being with soul and body as two opposing entities. This had consequences for the way Christians explained the belief in everlasting life.

Before the Christian era, Plato argued for immortality of the soul because of his dualistic view of the human being. The dualistic view not only separated man into two substances, but taught two different qualities as well. The human body was seen as being of a lesser value than the soul.

Under the influence of Plato's writing, belief in immortality as a quality in oneself, and with a negative view of the body as a consequence, secured a foothold in the Church. In this understanding immortality became part of the teaching of the Church, even though it was never reflected in the Classical Creeds. But we meet it as part of the Westminster Confession of Faith from the 17th century and from here the expression, though not the Platonic meaning of it, has become part of our doctrine.

God alone has immortality: 'God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see' (*1 Timothy 6:15-16*). He has the inexhaustible springs of life and energy. Man is mortal, and it is the clear teaching of Paul that immortality is a divine gift only through a future resurrection. In The Salvation Army as in other Protestant churches immortality is seen in this context and not as a quality in us.

The immortality of the soul has in some Christian traditions been used to explain what happens between death and resurrection, called the intermediate state. It is an attempt to explain what is outside time in terms of time. This has led to such traditions as praying to and for the dead, and a belief in 'purgatory' as a place for the soul to be purified and for a second chance to repent and embrace the gospel. There is no substantial biblical foundation for such beliefs. It is very clear that divine judgment is solely based on one's life on earth (*Matthew 25:32-46*).

The New Testament stresses that we die to be with Christ and in the presence of Christ. We do not overly engage ourselves in speculative details of this reality, which is as far beyond our understanding as it is outside the limits of time. We can trust that we will be safe in the hands of God.

1. *Lifestyle and ethics*

- a) Would you agree that the Kingdom of God is a present reality as well as a future hope?
- b) In what way can you say that you live in the reality of the Kingdom of God? Does it make sense to speak of that in your everyday life, in your business, studies, work and home? In what way does it affect your decisions and your life goals?
- c) Do you find it difficult to believe in the resurrection of the body? What are the difficulties? Is it central to your faith? If so, why?
- d) In today's world many people relate their faith in life after death to reincarnation (see *Salvation Story* page 148), which originates with Hinduism. Why do you think that is the case? Why is it that the doctrine of reincarnation is contrary to Christian faith?
- e) In which ways does our accountability at the day of judgment affect our lifestyle and attitudes?
- f) How can a belief in last things be reflected in life and in our choices in life?
- g) Case studies:
 - i. You have just received a message from the doctor that you have cancer and you were told that your chances to be healed are 50/50. Would your situation alter your lifestyle, especially in connection with how you spend your time and your resources? In what way? Would your situation alter your relationship to other people, to your family and friends? In what way? Do you think you would reconsider your values of life and priorities of life? How would the doctrine of last things relate to you personally and to your considerations at this crucial time?
 - ii. You are visiting a friend in hospital who knows she is facing death. How would you approach that visit? Would you try to connect the person with what is going on outside the hospital and, for example, talk about last night's TV programme and the coming holiday, the corps anniversary and the need for a new bandmaster? Would you stop there or would you have the courage to give the person a chance to relate how she feels facing death? Would you be able to acknowledge the value and impact of her life on you and in general? What sort of comfort would you give based on the Christian hope?
 - iii. Your neighbours have lost their five-year-old son in a car accident. You don't know them very well, but sometimes you have talked about the children, the weather and local news. How will you face the situation? Do you suddenly become extremely busy or absent minded when you are passing their door or them? Or do you go to visit to share in their grief by being present? How will you approach that? Do you think you would be wise enough to let silence speak and abstain from such remarks as: 'There is a meaning for everything,' or 'It is the will of God'. Why are these remarks not helpful in this situation? What will comfort your neighbours?

2. *The mission of the Church*

- a) Why is it important to witness to a faith that transcends this life?
- b) Is such a witness relevant to all ages? Is it as relevant in a youth club as in an over-sixties setting?
- c) What difference does the message of resurrection, eternal life and judgment have on people's present lives?
- d) Is belief in last things central to the mission of the Church? Why or why not?

3. *Personal ministry*

How does belief in the final judgment give an urgency to your witness and to seizing opportunities for witnessing?

WORSHIP

Ideas for personal and corporate worship

1. Read *Salvation Story* chapter eleven, 'Kingdom of the risen Lord' and meditate on it.
2. Find songs which reflect the Christian hope in a way which is relevant for you.
3. Bible readings:
 - a) the beginning of death – *Genesis 3:1-7, 17-19*;
 - b) the first death – *Genesis 4:1-10*;
 - c) death as part of our condition – *Psalms 90:1-6, 10-12, 16*;
 - d) the hope of the resurrection of the people – *Ezekiel 37:1-14*;
 - e) the fulfilment of the hope – *Romans 8:19-23, 38-39*;
 - f) the resurrection of Jesus Christ – *Matthew 28:1-8*;
 - g) the resurrection of man – *1 Corinthians 15:12-22, 42-44, 53-55*;
 - h) the praise of the saints – *Revelation 7:9-12*;
 - i) the death of death – *Revelation 21:1-5*.

Between the readings, light some candles, for example night candles, and place them in such a way that they form a cross.

4. Prepare to have some flowers in a deep red colour, for example, roses. Red is the colour of love and it is the colour which symbolised the death of Christ, but it is also the colour of the process of giving new life. Place the flowers one by one in a vase while you (or people from the congregation if it is corporate worship) mention the name of one who led you to new life in Christ, one who died in the assurance of the Christian hope.
5. Prayer (gratitude, anguish, assurance, etc.)
6. Lectionaries, creeds, affirmations of faith (see examples at the end of the Study Guide)
7. Write in your own words your belief in last things.

BIBLE STUDIES

Work through the major sections of the chapter and read the Bible references connected to the section. What do the Scripture readings teach us?

1. *The triumph of the Kingdom of God*

Revelation 21:1-7. What are the significant features of this vision in relation to the Kingdom of God?

2. *Eternal life*

Revelation 22:1-5. Which qualities does this image of eternal life promote? Can these qualities be reflected in your life today?

3. *Death and resurrection*

Romans 8:38-39 and *Psalms 116:15*. Compare the two texts. There is a positive attitude to death in each of them. What is the attitude based on, in a) Romans and in b) the Psalm? Is there a link between these basic attitudes?

4. Immortality of the soul

1 Timothy 6:13-16. Who alone possesses immortality according to the text? Which hope is at the centre of this text? Discuss your thoughts about the return of Christ? How does that affect your life as a Christian?

5. The resurrection of the body

1 Corinthians 15. Why do you think that the resurrection of Christ is so crucial to the Christian faith? Why do you think it is so obvious for Paul that our resurrection is a consequence of Christ's resurrection?

6. Ultimate accountability

Isaiah 2:12-17 and *Philippians 2:9-11*. Compare the two texts and discuss the similarities and differences between them concerning the image about the day of the Lord. What do they say about your response?

7. Judgment

Matthew 25:31-46. What does this text underline in relation to our life? Do you find a personal call in this text for the direction of your life?

8. Hell and Heaven

Mark 9:42-48. How is Hell described in these verses and what might be the implied description of Heaven? Why is the first mentioned sin so grave?

9. Sermon series suggestions

- a) The triumph of the Kingdom of God – *Isaiah 65:17-25*
 - i. The ultimate dream – what are the components?
 - ii. The Kingdom values – people in focus – joy, delight, health – life in abundance – peace
- b) Death, resurrection and eternal life – *1 Corinthians 15:20-26*
 - i. Death – the first and last enemy
 - ii. Christ the conqueror who broke the chains of death
 - iii. In Christ our chains of death will be broken
- c) Ultimate accountability – *Isaiah 2:12-17*
 - i. The day of the Lord
 - ii. The images of the high and lofty
 - iii. Accountability as humility
- d) Hell and Heaven – *Matthew 25; 31-46*
 - i. Surprise and ignorance as shared experience
 - ii. The stumbling block or saving factor – our relationship to other people
 - iii. Kingdom values – sensitivity and sympathy

HOW TO USE SALVATION STORY for spiritual enrichment

Using *Salvation Story* should be both personally enjoyable and provide us with effective ways to achieve a better life. The book can be used in two main ways for the development of spiritual life. These are:

- a) a personal self-development plan we can use ourselves;
- b) a corps or congregation/church fellowship programme we can share in with others.

A Individual self-development and devotional programme

1. *Enhancing our prayer life*

- a) We will want to focus on God himself. Adoration and worship can seem remote from daily living. This need not be so. Getting to know God, and having a fruitful, comfortable relationship with him, need only the same skills we use in being open to any other person.

We will discover as much as possible about his character. We will explore his intentions towards us, especially how interested he is in wanting to give himself to the relationship and what his expectations of us are.

So we will need to turn to those sections in *Salvation Story* which provide a guide to God's character; his interest in us; what he offers of himself; and what he would wish us to give him in return. We will discover helpful information about these areas in various parts of *Salvation Story*. As a start, let us focus on these four areas as we turn to :

chapters two and seven for God's character;

chapter seven for how it shows God's commitment to us without reservation;

chapters eight and nine for what he offers;

chapter six (section: 'Created in the image of God', page 59) and chapter ten for how we can show him how much we love him by working to promote the welfare of all his children and our world generally.

- b) We do not need to be anxious about the kinds of prayer known as petition and intercession. This is only asking God to help us or someone we care about. We will know what we want for ourselves, or others, when we are comfortable in our child-parent relationship with God. We may ask anything, while letting God give us his own thoughts on what we have requested. To help us ask for useful things, we could look especially at chapters five through ten of *Salvation Story*. If we are not sure about our relationship with Christ as Saviour, we could look at 'The blessings of salvation', page 77. Chapter ten gives useful suggestions for helping others, but we will also find that the paragraph 'The Holy Spirit intercedes for us', page 54, shows us that asking things for others is a lovely partnership with us and God.

2. *Enriching your Bible study*

'Rightly dividing the word of truth' (2 Timothy 2:15); 'correctly handles the word of truth' (NIV); 'laying out the truth plain and simple' (The Message).

We begin by gaining a clear view of the value of our Bible by reading *Salvation Story*, chapter one. Then we look through the chapters of *Salvation Story* and decide for ourselves which section has the most immediate interest for us personally. In time we will want to visit all the topics included in the book. However, we ought not to set ourselves a daunting task, but rather begin with whatever interests us most. Having chosen a section to begin with, we may look up the Bible references given in heavy type at the end of the section. We may wish to try several translations until we find one that suits us, before buying our own copy. We can ask friends to let us see their Bibles, or ask at our local library.

We can imagine that each Bible reference is a letter to us from God which is intended to make clear the teaching the section contains. We can then ask God to help us understand just what the Bible passage means by asking the

Bible text the questions we want answers to. We must not hurry or jump to quick conclusions. We need to think about it. God in his great love has given us both our own intelligence and the Holy Spirit who comes alongside to guide us into all truth (*John 5:39; 14:15-18, 25-26; 16:12*).

3. Developing our character as children of God

- a) The development of our character as children of God involves the following:
 - i. relational skills, personal evaluation (knowing our self-worth), dealing with unresolved psychological conflicts, failure or guilt, and the ability to affect circumstances or effect change;
 - ii. clarifying our motivation, planning our life and life-style, with any necessary action to achieve these goals;
 - iii. including, amongst others, these goals: motivating others, working with others, developing our family, including training our children.

- b) Using *Salvation Story* in the establishment of a personal self-development programme will include particular attention to the following sections of *Salvation Story*:
 - chapter two: 'The Character of God'
 - 'A God in fellowship'
 - 'A God who makes himself known'
 - 'A God involved with us'
 - chapter three: 'God the Father'
 - chapter six: 'Created in the image of God'
 - chapter seven: 'Grace and free will'; 'Repentance and faith'
 - chapter eight: 'Regeneration', 'Assurance'
 - chapter nine: 'Continued obedient faith'; 'The sanctifying Spirit at work' (especially 'A radical life-change' and 'A lifelong process'); 'Wholeness, health and healing'.

These sections have particular value in helping us foster self-esteem. The development of relational skills can then be tackled.

c) Achieving relational skills

The skills we have to relate to others are inborn and quite natural. What is the evidence of this? The evidence lies in our experience of language learning. This includes speech as well as body-language and facial expressions. These are all learned, but the ability to learn, the mental process pathways, the mechanisms of correlating the signals (sounds and visual signals), are present in the genetic coding which builds the brain of the embryo.

How may we recover or develop relational skills? The same way as a baby develops its ability to relate to other people and then make conversation, that is communicate by speech. The baby listens to and watches others, then tries out noises, words, gestures and facial expressions. The baby copies, practises all the time, learning how to do these things successfully to achieve goals and satisfy needs. In this way the baby becomes able to speak and relate to other people in a meaningful way.

For those of us who may have come from dysfunctional families, we can be healed from that damage by being incorporated into God's family and developing relational skills in that new family body. A dysfunctional family may produce dysfunctional children/adults, while a dynamic, successful family in skilled relationships should produce similarly enabled children/adults. The gospel is good news for anyone disabled by their dysfunctional upbringing, or personal impairment. We can, by incorporation into a successful family (i.e. the family of God, the Christian Church through a local congregation), begin to learn in the same way a baby learns (see above) and so achieve personal development into social and relational competence.

Practice makes perfect. We need to begin where we are, using the resources of our family, church fellowship, work colleagues, superiors and subordinates. We must always remember that we are loved. We have a purpose in life. We are valuable. We are unique. We can make a difference in the world. We can learn both

to receive and to give. (Our skin is not a frontier: our personal influence extends beyond our immediate physical location.) See especially chapters three through five, also seven, of *Salvation Story*.

B Development of corps for mission

Using *Salvation Story* within a corps Bible study group, mission planning team or outreach strategy council.

1. We will find the mission statement paragraphs at the end of the chapters of *Salvation Story* helpful. We begin with one of chapter ten's headings: 'A community renewed for the future', page 109. We will notice from this paragraph that the corps (the united congregation/local church) has a mission to open Christ's future, including the present realisation of that future, both for ourselves and others. Note: 'realisation' means both 'to grasp intellectually/intelligently by illumination/intuition or revelation from God' and also 'to make real' by practice and experience both in individual lives and the united life of God's people. We may then study the other sections of the chapter, including any Scriptures listed, which are meaningful to the corps/study group.

2. Next we may use the other chapters in the same way, beginning with the mission paragraphs listed below, and then using the rest of the chapter to unlock their meanings and relate the ideas we discover to the teaching of the Bible references given.

3. A suggested order for studying the mission statements in this way is as follows:

chapter seven	page 75	'A gospel to be proclaimed'
chapter six	page 66	'A world to be saved'
chapter four	page 43	'A story to be told'
chapter five	page 55	'A mission empowered'
chapter two	page 22	'A God to make known'
chapter three	page 34	'A love to be shared'
chapter eleven	page 121	'A hope to be shared'
chapter eight	page 84	'A salvation to be claimed'
chapter nine	page 94	'A holiness to be lived out in mission'

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 worldwide 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 mobilisation), 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 recognised.

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, recognising the vast potential for innovative worship and ministry within the freedom which the Army already enjoys in Christ.

SACRAMENTS

It was recognised 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 centre of its corporate worship has always been vital to the spiritual life of the Army. Recognising 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 ritualising 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 recognised 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 baptised 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 baptised 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 worldwide to recognise 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 page 121).

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 recognised 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 revitalised recognition of what God can do in and through his Army by his Spirit and in the freedom which Christ gives.

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 Saviour 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 fulfil 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 baptised into the one body by the Holy Spirit (*1 Corinthians 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 practised by some other Christians.
9. The Salvation Army acknowledges that there are many worthy ways of publicly witnessing to having been baptised 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 centre 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 ritualising 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 recognise 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 centre.
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 recognise 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 programmes 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.

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 epicentre 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 symbolises 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, baptising 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 practised 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. Practising 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. Practising 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 characterised by our shared vision, mission and joyful service. In our life together we share responsibility for one another's spiritual wellbeing. The vitality of our spiritual life is also enhanced by our accountability to one another, and when we practise 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. Practising 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 realise 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 recognise that families everywhere are subject to dysfunction and disintegration in an increasingly urbanised world in which depersonalisation, 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

Recognising 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 emphasised.
- * 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 centre.
- * 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.

**EXAMPLES OF
CONTEMPORARY
SALVATIONIST CREEDS
SUITABLE FOR USE IN SALVATION ARMY WORSHIP**

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH A

We believe in God's self-disclosure, or revelation, the ground of which is love, and the purpose of which is the creation of an everlasting fellowship and society in which by our freewill acceptance of God's transforming grace we may find personal identity and fulfilment.

We believe that this revelation is pre-eminently through the Scriptures of Old and New Testaments, confirmed by the Holy Spirit both personally and through the witness of the community of Christian believers. The three-fold agreement of Scripture, Church and conscience is essential to validate the Christian faith and the authenticity of divine revelation.

We believe that God is made known to us as Father Creator, defined in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, confirmed by the work of the Holy Spirit and declared in Scripture.

We believe in God the Father Almighty, maker, sustainer and arbiter of Heaven and earth.

We believe that Jesus Christ is Lord, and that in his person the divine and human natures are united, so that he is truly and properly God and truly and properly man. As God's only Son he was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of Mary. As Israel's Messiah he proclaimed God's Kingdom by word and deed; he suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; he rose again from the dead on the third day; he ascended to his Father in glory; enthroned in divine splendour he gives gifts to his own through the Holy Spirit; at the last day he shall come to judge both the living and the dead and to establish the everlasting reign of truth and love.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, witness to the Son and revealer of the Father. He is regenerator and sanctifier of all who repent of their rebellion against God and who put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as only saviour, and he will keep them beyond reproach until Jesus comes in glory. He is the author and interpreter of Scripture, the inspiration of the prophets, apostles and God's children generally, and the life of the Church.

We believe that there are these three persons in the Godhead – Father, Son and Spirit – who are undivided in essence and co-equal in power and glory, and that this one God, without peer, is infinitely perfect, the only proper object of worship.

We believe that all people are called into the divine society and fellowship of the triune God, so that every believer, filled with the Spirit, is part of the body of Christ: that is of the Church both militant and triumphant, on pilgrimage and in glory.

We believe in the divine imperative of the Lord Jesus Christ to go into all the world and make disciples of every nation, and that while the conscious rejection of the gospel by those who turn away from God results in their total loss, the freewill acceptance of Jesus Christ is eternal life to all who believe.

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH B

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, creator, preserver and governor of all things, whose love and saving purposes have been revealed through his acts in history and, uniquely, in his Son, Jesus Christ.

We believe in Jesus Christ, conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, who suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified for the redemption of the whole human race, and who was raised to life again by the glory of the Father. We believe that his human life presents a universal example and his teaching retains eternal validity. He will return in glory to judge all generations.

We believe in the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father through the intercession of the Son; the Spirit inspired the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments so that they provide the authority for Christian belief and conduct; he awakens people to their need of salvation, imparts faith to those who would believe and new life to all who trust in Jesus. He commences the work of sanctification which accompanies justification, and can lead the Christian to perfect victory over sin.

We believe that the one God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We believe that the Church is composed of all who trust Christ as saviour and share his risen life.

We believe that God wills the salvation of society as well as of individuals and that the Kingdom of God is to come in all its fullness in this life, on earth, and that eternal life awaits all who have turned to God in repentant faith.

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH C

We believe in one Almighty God, Son and Holy Spirit – in total unity from eternity to eternity, simultaneously present in this world – its past, present and future and exceeding the borders of our world and comprehension.

We believe in God the Father – the origin of all that is – the creator of life, creating us in his image to live in harmony with himself and the rest of creation: a situation destroyed by our disobedience, from which we cannot redeem ourselves.

We believe in God the Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, the man in whom God was incarnated, who was born of the virgin Mary, who in his life proclaimed the coming of the Kingdom of God, who healed and restored new hope and faith, who was charged, tortured, condemned and at last suffered death on a cross, but by God's creative power on the third day was raised from death. His death on the Cross became our redemption from sin and disobedience, a redemption offered to us by grace, through faith, and which we can receive or reject.

We believe in God the Holy Spirit who is present in this world; who is active at our salvation; who brings about our sanctification; who creates assurance of these gifts in our life; who arouses to repentance and faith; who calls to the imitation of Christ, a growth in grace and a holy life; who gives us gifts of grace and fosters fruits of sanctification, who creates the Church's life, service and mission, and here effects God's grace directly to us; and who has inspired the Scriptures of the Bible, which constitute the rule of Christian faith and practice.

We believe in the resurrection of the body, the return of Christ to judge the living and the dead, and an eternal life where God will be all in all.

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH D

Recognising the authority of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the only divine rule of faith and Christian life,

We believe in God the Almighty Father, Eternal God and God of Love, Creator of the Universe and Source of all things.

We believe in Jesus Christ, his Son, our Saviour, truly God and truly man, crucified and raised. Although sin separates us from God, we receive in him, through faith, free forgiveness, reconciliation with our Creator and Eternal life.

We believe in the Holy Spirit who makes us new creatures. He sanctifies us, builds us up in Christ and keeps us in communion with all believers who await faithfully the coming of the Kingdom of God.

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH E (In French)

Reconnaissant l'autorité des Ecritures de L'Ancien et du Nouveau Testament comme seule règle de la foi et de la vie chrétienne.

Nous croyons en Dieu le Père tout-puissant, Dieu éternel et Dieu d'amour, créateur de l'univers et source de toute vie.

Nous croyons en Jésus-Christ, son Fils, notre Seigneur, vrai Dieu et vrai homme, crucifié et ressuscité. Alors que le péché nous sépare de Dieu, nous recevons gratuitement en Lui, par la foi, le pardon, la réconciliation avec notre Créateur, et la vie éternelle.

Nous croyons au Saint-Esprit qui fait de nous de nouvelles créatures. Il nous sanctifie, nous édifie en Christ, et nous garde dans la communion de tous les croyants qui attendent fidèlement la venue du Règne de Dieu.

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH F (In German)

Wir anerkennen die Autorität der Schriften des Alten und des Neuen Testaments als einzige Richtschnur des Glaubens und des christlichen Lebens.

Wir glauben an Gott, den allmächtigen Vater, ewiger Gott und Gott der Liebe, Schöpfer des Universums und Quelle allen Lebens.

Wir glauben an Jesus Christus, seinen Sohn, unsern Herrn, wahrhaft Gott und wahrhaft Mensch, gekreuzigt und auferstanden. Wenn auch die Sünde uns trennt von Gott, erhalten wir doch in Ihm, durch den Glauben, freie Vergebung, Versöhnung mit unserem Schöpfer und ewiges Leben.

Wir glauben an den Heiligen Geist, der uns zu Neuschöpfungen macht. Er heiligt uns, erbaut uns durch Christus und bewahrt uns in der Gemeinschaft aller Glaubenden, die treu das Kommen des Reiches Gottes erwarten.

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH G

We worship one God and no other, who reveals himself and manifests his love in the persons of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

We believe in God the Father, who made all things in Heaven and on earth, and, in his image, us, who by our violation of his will marred the image and fell captive to sin.

We believe in God the Son, Jesus Christ through whom the worlds were made, who, without forfeiting his divinity, became fully man by the Holy Spirit, inaugurated the new Kingdom, was crucified by man, raised by the Father victorious over death and, by this, an atonement was made for the sin of the whole world and the doors thus opened to his eternal Kingdom.

We believe in God the Holy Spirit, through whom a change of heart toward God, faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and the new birth are brought about; who gives assurance of salvation and strength for obedience; who grants us power over sin, love over fear, and life over death; who sanctifies the believer and preserves him blameless until the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.

We believe in the gospel, the message of God's redemptive word, revealed fully in Jesus Christ and soundly preserved in the whole of Scripture by inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

We believe in the Church, called by Christ into fellowship and mission, empowered by the Holy Spirit, destined for eternity.

Thanks be to God!

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH H

We believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, infinite in majesty, holiness and love; who makes himself known to us through the Bible, his word.

We believe in God the Father, creator and sustainer of all that is, God for us; who created all people in his image, in love and for love. He loves us still, in spite of corruption, waywardness and the sin which alienates us from him and longs to save us from ourselves.

We believe in Jesus Christ, God's Son, our Lord, born into the world through the power of the Spirit, God among us; who in obedience to the Father came announcing the good news of the Kingdom of God. He was rejected, crucified on a cross and buried in the grave. But God raised him from the dead to new life and he lives and reigns eternally in Heaven. His death frees us from our sins and reunites us with God as we put our trust in him: his resurrection brings us the glorious hope of eternal life.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Life-giver, God with us. In him, Jesus, the Word of God, is made plain to us; in him, we are moved to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, we are born again to new life and are made able to grow in goodness and holiness as we follow Christ. In him, we are brought into the fellowship of his body here on earth, which is the Church, to love each other and together to announce the good news to the world until Jesus Christ comes again, as Judge and King.

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH I

We believe that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the word of God written and the only divine rule of Christian faith and practice.

We believe that there is only one God, whom alone we worship, eternally existing in God the Father, creator of Heaven and earth; God the Son in whom humanity and deity are united; and God the Holy Spirit, Lord and giver of life.

We believe that we were created in the image of God to live in harmony with God and creation, but because of our disobedience and sin we are now powerless to choose between good or evil solely on our own.

We believe that Jesus Christ took upon himself human form, suffered and died and was raised by the Glory of the Father to save the whole world.

We believe that we are justified by grace through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and are born again by the Holy Spirit who testifies to salvation in our hearts.

We believe in sanctification by grace through faith, and that we can be empowered by the Holy Spirit to lead a life of holiness.

We believe that we are the Church of the living God, the body of Christ, called to continue the mission and ministry of our Lord.

We believe in Christ's return in glory, the resurrection of the body, the final accountability of all persons to God, the endless despair of those who reject salvation, and the eternal happiness of those who are righteous through faith in Jesus Christ.

A SALVATION ARMY
LECTIONARY
Based on
SALVATION STORY
Salvationist Handbook of Doctrine

The Christian Year

Advent

1st Sunday (Bible Sunday)

2nd Sunday

3rd Sunday

4th Sunday

Christmas Eve- 24 December

Christmas Day

Watchnight/New Year's Day

Covenant Sunday – 1st Sunday in the New Year

Epiphany – 6 January

Self-Denial/World Services Sunday

Shrove Tuesday

Lent – Ash Wednesday

Mothers' Day

Candidates' Sunday

Annunciation – 25 March

Holy Week

Palm Sunday

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Maundy Thursday

Good Friday

Saturday

Easter Day

Ascension Day

Corps Anniversary (date as corps's tradition)

Pentecost Sunday

Founder's Day – 2 July

Michaelmas – 29 September

Harvest Festival

Ministry of Healing Sunday – 3rd Sunday in October

All Saints Day – 1 November

The following is a lectionary which allows *Salvation Story* to be covered within approximately one year.

Each Sunday or Church/Army festival is assigned a portion of the Handbook text which will provide a theme for the day. The Scripture portions suggested at the end of the section in *Salvation Story* will provide inspiration for a variety of approaches to the subject in question. The lectionary deliberately moves across the range of the 11 chapters to provide a variety of themes, but there is no reason why a particular chapter should not be dealt with

in its entirety as a basis for a series. Any officer/corps following the lectionary will find that the main themes of the Christian faith are covered and this will provide a balanced diet of teaching to nourish and nurture disciples. Discerning preachers/teachers will best know their own people's needs.

The Lectionary lists:

- A. Sundays which are major festivals of the Church
- B. Sunday themes for the rest of the year
- C. major festivals which fall on a weekday.

Where there are no preaching opportunities on a weekday festival, the chosen portion could be used on a Sunday either before or after the date.

A. Sundays which are major festivals of the Church

Advent

1st Sunday (Bible Sunday)	Chapter one	'A word for all time' first and last sections – pages 1,10 (Scripture page 10)
2nd Sunday	Chapter eleven	'The Triumph of the Kingdom of God' – page 116
3rd Sunday	Chapter eleven	'Ultimate accountability' 'Judgement' 'Hell and Heaven' – pages 119-120
4th Sunday	Chapter four	'Jesus, God's Son' – pages 37-39
Covenant Sunday –		
1st Sunday in New Year	Chapter nine	'The Life of Holiness' – pages 91-93
Self-Denial Sunday (World Services)	Chapter ten	'The scattered community' – pages 107-109
Mothers' Day	Chapter five	'The Holy Spirit is the giver of life: In re-creation' – Sections 1 and 2, pages 52-53
Fathers' Day	Chapter three	'God the Father' – pages 25-27
Palm Sunday	Chapter seven	'Our salvation story' – page 42
Easter Day	Chapter seven	'Our crucified and risen Lord' – page 71
Pentecost/Whitsun	Chapter five	'The Holy Spirit is free and powerful' – page 52
Harvest Thanksgiving	Chapter three	'Preserver and governor' – pages 29-30
Ministry of Healing Sunday	Chapter nine	'Wholeness, health and healing' – pages 93-94
Trinity Sunday	Chapter two	'A God in fellowship' – pages 15-16

B. Sunday themes for the rest of the year

Regular Sundays

1. Chapter one 'Revelation' – pages 4-5
2. Chapter two 'A God who makes himself known' – pages 16-17
3. Chapter three 'Creator of Heaven and earth' – pages 27-28
4. Chapter four 'God's eternal Son' – (introduction) pages 35-36
5. Chapter five 'The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ' – page 51
6. Chapter six 'Creation and Fall: the biblical witness' – page 59
7. Chapter seven 'The Atonement foreshadowed' – pages 68-69
8. Chapter eight 'Justification' – pages 77-78
9. Chapter nine 'Continued obedient faith' – pages 85-86
10. Chapter ten 'The body of Christ' – page 101
11. Chapter eleven 'Eternal life' – page 117
12. Chapter one 'Given by inspiration' pages 5-6
13. Chapter two 'A God involved with us' – pages 17-18
14. Chapter three 'Perfect in holiness', 'Perfect in Wisdom' – pages 30-31
15. Chapter four 'Salvation Story – The public ministry of Jesus' – page 40
16. Chapter five 'The Holy Spirit is Lord' – page 51
17. Chapter six 'Created in the image of God' – pages 59-60

18. Chapter seven	'Understanding the Atonement' – pages 69-71
19. Chapter eight	'Justified by grace' – pages 78-79
20. Chapter nine	'The sanctifying Spirit at work', 'God's gracious provision' – pages 86-88
21. Chapter ten	'The people of God' – pages 101-102
22. Chapter eleven	'Death and resurrection' – page 117
23. Chapter one	'Authority' – pages 6-7
24. Chapter two	'The character of God' – pages 18-19
25. Chapter three	'Perfect in power, Perfect in love' – pages 31-32
26. Chapter four	'Jesus Christ our Lord' – page 39
27. Chapter five	'The Holy Spirit is the giver of life' – sections 3-5, pages 53-54
28. Chapter six	'Fallen humanity' – pages 60-61
29. Chapter seven	'Death and life for all believers' – pages 71-72
30. Chapter eight	'Justification through faith' – pages 79-80
31. Chapter nine	'The sanctifying Spirit at work', 'By grace through faith' – pages 88-89
32. Chapter ten	'The community of reconciliation' – pages 102-103
33. Chapter eleven	'The immortality of the soul', 'The resurrection of the body' – pages 117-119
34. Chapter two	'The human response' – pages 19-21
35. Chapter three	'Love and power', 'Love, power and suffering' – pages 32-34
36. Chapter five	'The Holy Spirit is the giver of life: in the Church' – pages 54-55
37. Chapter six	'Salvation through the grace of God' – pages 61-64
38. Chapter seven	'Repentance and faith' – page 73-75
39. Chapter eight	'Regeneration' – pages 80-82
40. Chapter six	'The origin of sin', 'The nature of sin' – pages 61-64
41. Chapter eight	'Assurance' – pages 82-84
42. Chapter ten	'The continuing community' – page 103
43. Chapter six	'The consequence of sin' – pages 64-65
44. Appendix 8	'The use and abuse of spiritual gifts' – pages 111-112

C. Major festivals which fall on a weekday

Christmas Day	Chapter four	'Jesus the man' – pages 36-37
Watchnight	Chapter ten	'A community renewed for the future' – pages 109- 110
Epiphany	Chapter ten	'The sacramental community' – pages 105-107
Shrove Tuesday (Mardi Gras)	Chapter nine	'The sanctifying Spirit at work', 'A radical life- change' – pages 89-90
Ash Wednesday (Lent)	Chapter nine	'The sanctifying spirit at work', 'A lifelong process' – pages 90-91
Annunciation (25 March)	Chapter four	'The Incarnation' – pages 37-38
Maundy Thursday	Chapter ten	'The Church is created by the Holy Spirit for fellowship', 'The gathered community' – pages 103- 104
Good Friday	Chapter four	'Salvation story', 'The death of Jesus' – pages 40-41
Ascension Day	Chapter four	'Salvation Story', 'The Ascension of the Lord Jesus' – page 41
Founders' Day	Chapter seven	'Grace and free will' – pages 72-73
Michaelmas (29 September)/The Church Triumphant:	Chapter four	'Salvation Story', 'The return of Christ' – page 42
All Saints' Day (1 November)/Suitable for Veterans' Day	Chapter ten	'The people of God' – pages 101-102

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