



LIEUT-COLONEL ELSA A. OALANG  
LITERARY SECRETARY, EDITOR *THE WAR CRY*  
AND ASSISTANT PERSONNEL SECRETARY  
THE PHILIPPINES TERRITORY

## LAST THINGS: THE SALVATIONIST'S STATEMENT OF FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE

# DOCTRINE FOR TODAY

SERIES: THE ARMY'S ELEVEN ARTICLES OF FAITH

### [Doctrine 11]

*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.*

**I**N HIS foreword to *Salvation Story*, General Paul Rader wrote: 'What Salvationists believe has never been incidental to how we live out our life in Christ as individuals, or as a global spiritual movement. Our faith, grounded in Scripture and validated victoriously by personal experience, has been the motive force of our obedience in mission.'

The previous 10 discussions on doctrines in this series categorically declared that The Salvation Army's statement of faith reflects the primacy of the divine truths of the Scriptures and the glaring testimonies of history and human experience. However, the 11th doctrine takes

us to a more challenging level in our faith journey as individuals and as a church. For who among us can validate by experience the truths concerning the 'things to come'? Diversity of eschatological teachings among Christians show how human finitude and curiosity wrestle and discuss with scant biblical declarations on the subject. Others delve on apocalyptic details and so widen the gap and multiply the diversity of teachings. They also reveal how our particular context and era influence our beliefs on the divine hope that is ours in Christ. Understandably, this curiosity may cause a tension and a discord in our eschatological views. At times, we even struggle with our own beliefs.

#### NOW I KNOW IN PART

It is from this approach that I begin by using the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:12-13: 'For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.'

This passage is part of a long discussion on spiritual gifts. Here, Paul presents his argument about the supremacy of love in the light of eternity. Love should be the supreme ingredient and the prime mover of every spiritual gift. All other gifts are imperfect and will eventually pass away. Even our understanding is imperfect. Some Bible scholars believe the words

'then we shall see face to face' refer to God the Giver of spiritual gifts. Other scholars believe they talk about our understanding of spiritual truths which will become full when Christ returns. The differences in theological views and biblical interpretations are enough proof to say that, for now, we only know in part.

#### FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE

Paul ends the chapter with a strong punchline: 'And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.' A closer look into Pauline soteriology and eschatology reveals that, for Paul, faith, hope and love are indispensable in the believer's journey from earth to Glory. For Paul, our divine hope must define and describe our lives and proclamation. In Colossians 1:5, he pictures a believer's faith and love as springing forth from the hope that is stored up in Heaven. This hope is founded on Christ (1 Thessalonians 1:3) and believers are exhorted to 'be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet' (5:8).

Apparently, hope is forward looking, anticipating and patiently waiting and working for the consummation of the believers' full and final salvation. 'For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently' (Romans 8:24-25).

#### FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

- \* WHAT HOPES AND BELIEFS DO WE HAVE REGARDING THE 'THINGS TO COME' OR THE LAST DAYS?
- \* HOW DO OUR HOPES AND BELIEFS AFFECT OUR SPIRITUAL JOURNEY AND RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER PEOPLE?
- \* IN THE LIGHT OF OUR ETERNAL HOPE IN CHRIST, HOW DO WE JOIN GOD IN HIS MISSION TO ESTABLISH HIS KINGDOM ON EARTH?

#### MAY YOUR KINGDOM COME

The motif of faith, hope and love reverberates in the eschatological teachings of Jesus. He taught his disciples to pray, 'Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven' (Matthew 6:10) and in verse 12 described how the rule of God should impact their lives: 'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.' What a radical challenge to the established norm of 'eye for eye, and tooth for tooth' (Matthew 5:38), and love confined to friends and hatred to enemies (v 43).

In the *kerygma* of Jesus, the Kingdom of God is 'already here but not yet'. Referring to himself, Jesus said 'the kingdom of God is in your midst' (Luke 17:21). In the next chapter (v 17), Jesus refers to receiving the Kingdom of God like a little child (that is, *now*) as the condition to entering the same (in the *future*). To receive the Kingdom of God is to allow the rule of God in every area of the believer's life: 'But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness...' (Matthew 6:33); loving and blessing our enemies (Matthew 5:43-47); and considering the 'least' as the embodiment of his presence, appealing for justice and mercy (Matthew 25:40).

The essence of inaugurated eschatology is evident as Christ calls the Church to become the present reality of the Kingdom of God on earth. He empowers the Church when he declared: '...and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven' (Matthew 16:18-19). The Church will only find

the true meaning of its existence as it endeavours to partner with God in the realisation of his Kingdom on earth so that some day 'People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God' (Luke 13:29).

#### OUR RESURRECTION HOPE

Salvationists believe that we are pilgrims on a journey. Because Christ rose from the grave, we too can look forward to our glorious resurrection (John 11:25). There are nearly 40 songs under the heading 'Eternal hope' in our newly published songbook. Themes such as the eternal beauty and happiness in Heaven, the crown of glory that awaits the saints, the white robe of the pure in heart and the 'well done' greeting of God awaken in us a divine anticipation. Our faith rises above the struggles of life. Death is therefore regarded as a river to cross not a road end to dread.

However, Salvationists should remember that even our most profound imagination could not fully grasp and describe the eternal life with God; not even what a resurrected 'body' looks like. God in his wisdom has kept the gift wrapped in mystery so that the consummation will be far beyond what our human minds can fathom.

#### LOVE AGAINST BELIEF

At every commissioning, the recitation of the Army's statement of faith is always punctuated as the cadets reach the 11th doctrine with either a sigh of relief or a shout of 'Hallelujah!'. The congregation will then respond with a loud 'Amen'. Amen to the immortality of the

soul, the eternal happiness of the righteous – but what about the endless punishment of the wicked?

As the commissioning ceremony comes to the prayer of dedication, the reality whispers again – each cadet is commissioned to a life of service, to snatch the wicked from the mouth of endless punishment. Just as we cannot fully understand the beauty of the 'eternal happiness of the righteous', we cannot also fully comprehend the meaning of the 'endless punishment of the wicked'. Both are in the hands of Almighty God. The diverse eschatological beliefs regarding the destiny of the wicked should never obstruct the urgency of the Salvationist's calling to bring people to a knowledge and experience of God so that wickedness will not rule.

It is with this calling that the Salvationist's passion for souls works against the fulfilment of his/her belief. Our service and proclamation reflect our struggle against evil on personal, relational and societal levels. In this battle against evil, we express our undaunted faith by our acts of compassion fuelled by the blessed hope we have in Christ.

May God's Kingdom come, may his will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.