

**The Salvation Army**  
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**GLOBAL CONVERSATION SESSION 1A**

**“What does fullness of life (full salvation) mean in the 21st Century?”**

**Commissioner Torben Eliassen**  
**International Secretary for Americas and the Caribbean**  
**International Headquarters**

**Introduction**

The phrase “Fullness of Life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” naturally suggests three steps to its understanding and that is how this paper will address this issue. Firstly, it will seek an understanding about fullness of life. Secondly, it will seek an understanding about the twenty first century. Thirdly, it will seek an understanding of how the first fits into the second.

Comprehension of this theme might help to answer the most crucial question of our days, which is: How to remain faithful to the Word of God and yet be relevant to the present society?

As we engage in this Social Work and Emergency Disaster Services Conference to discuss the way forward for “serving suffering humanity” there are some unavoidable facts to consider if we are to truly be The Salvation Army.

The first fact to consider is what is The Salvation Army? Our mission statement answers this affirming: “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 the love of God. Its mission is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and to meet human needs in His name without discrimination”.

The second fact to consider is what does the Salvation Army believe? Its first Doctrine answers affirming: “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”.

The Army’s mission statement and doctrine leave no room for doubt as to the nature of service from The Salvation Army. The Army serves suffering humanity as Jesus did. The Army’s service is inspired and shaped by Jesus’ service as clearly outlined in the Bible. Therefore the principles of service set up by Jesus are not to be avoided but embraced. Jesus’ example must not only be the inspiration but the framework of service to be followed.

## **1. Fullness of Life**

### Embracing fullness of life's possibilities

Fullness of life for The Salvation Army is to embrace the life offered by God in Jesus Christ through his Spirit as taught in the Bible. Many are the verses from the word of God that describe this life. John 10:10 is certainly one of the obvious ones: "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10).

While the thief takes from life, Jesus gives to life. While the thief kills life, Jesus creates life. While the thief destroys life, Jesus builds life. This life as found in Jesus goes beyond the dimension of only *material life* (*Genesis 2:7*), it also includes the dimensions of *spiritual life* (*Ephesians 2:5*) and *eternal life* (*John 6:40*). To limit any of these possibilities as embodied by Jesus Christ and offered by him is to limit the possibility of hope and transformation of lives of people and communities.

### Embracing fullness of life's responsibilities

Fullness of life means to receive from Jesus all the possibilities that he brings to us but also to follow him and assume his life-style.

Jesus' life-style is clearly described by the apostle Paul when writing to the Philippians (2:1-8) urging them to have the same mind-set of Jesus. Paul invites them to assume Jesus's life-style and like Jesus have total abnegation (v6). Jesus gave up his rights detaching himself of everything he was entitled to! To have total identification (v7) - Jesus identified with all people becoming like them! And to have total consecration! (v8) - Jesus didn't do his own thing; He did his Father's thing until the end!

Analysing Jesus' life and action towards humanity, especially focusing on how he interacted with the marginalised and dispossessed, one has to conclude that his support to people had less to do with institutional service provision and more to do with personal servanthood living.

Fullness of Life for the Salvation Army means that its entire people (officers, soldiers, employees, volunteers) will embrace the possibilities and responsibilities that Jesus's life brings and will express that to the world through servanthood living in Christlike humility.

## **2. The 21st Century**

If someone in the beginning of the 20th Century would attempt to describe that century the most that would be accomplished is a total misrepresentation of it. So to attempt to describe the 21st century less than two decades into it is to embark in the same clairvoyant exercise. The most we can do is to recognize some present trends and tendencies and try to guess how these will continue to evolve and influence.

The end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century has been called by social scholars as the "post-modern" era. Some will say that we are already passed this "post-modern" era and are already into a form of a "technology" era (mainly under influence of all

the information technology possibilities). Whichever way we understand the present age we can still affirm that the basic characteristics of “post-modernity” are still present.

The main characteristics of “post-modernity” can be described in three terms or headlines, these are: *secularization*, *pluralization* and *privatization*. These characteristics do influence and affect the wide world differently and with different intensities. But to a certain degree globalization has spread it world-widely.

### Secularization

*Secularization* is a phenomena or process through which what is spiritual loses its value to people. In other words, the religious ideas and institutions lose the place that they once had as representatives from the divine. In a secularized society the sacred loses its importance giving way to the profane. The spiritual, in the biblical sense, become obsolete, old fashioned, almost stale.

The church continues to advise and lead people, however the people don't accept it because they no longer accept the church's transcendence. People don't accept God, as the one who established the standards from the creation. God created the world with wisdom, but that is no longer the reading people make about the world. The world is seen as a mathematical reason and not a philosophical one and even less so a theological one.

### Pluralization

*Pluralization* is the hallmark of a society that has taken to the extreme its desire to choose, to opt and to manifest its preferences. No one in the present days likes to buy whatever item without having the possibility to choose between several products. This desire for choices influences all other areas.

Religion becomes just another item in the market. To survive, the churches need to undergo constant modifications and adaptations. In the market mentality it is the customer who is always right and, as the customers' tastes rapidly change, the marketing mentality forces the church to adapt to whatever new wind may blow. So many ecclesiastic fashions and winds of doctrine can be understood as the need to please people as if they were customers.

In this setting The Salvation Army is seen as just one other Christian organization amongst many other existing ones struggling to be chosen by the customers.

### Privatization

*Privatization* can be defined as the rupture between the private and public spheres. There is an exaltation of the importance of the private as the only sphere for freedom and individual realization. Whatever is done in private sphere and doesn't affect the public sphere becomes acceptable.

Privatization means total freedom but only in the private sphere. No one dares to force it in the public sphere, each one with its privacy. If one believes in the Bach flowers it is fine, if another practices swing it is okay, if someone takes drugs it is acceptable, actually it doesn't matter what is done in the private sphere as long as the public sphere is preserved. In the

private sphere everything is acceptable as long as it doesn't affect the public sphere. As long as everything is done individually and in private there is no harm to the public sphere. One can feel free.

### Globalization

What the new "technology" era has introduced is "globalization" which is the worldwide sharing of ideas and information at the click of a button. The "post-modern" tendencies are now rapidly available to the entire world.

### **3. Fullness of Life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

One might be perplexed as to how fullness of life can fit in the 21<sup>st</sup> century! The amazing thing however is that the word of God is timeless and therefore perfectly applicable in the present days. He who is the Alpha and Omega (Revelations 1:8) cannot become outdated. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

Fullness of life can be expressed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as we continue to follow Jesus, and we continue to embrace the possibilities and responsibilities from following him. Jesus never anchored himself on the established religion but sought to express God's love as he related to people.

### Clarity of being

As we engage in service as Jesus did one thing that must be asked is what kind of Army are we and who do we really serve? The superficial answer might be that we are a "charity" that serves "suffering humanity" however this answer is wrong. Jesus was the son of God and he served the Father. Jesus did not serve people, Jesus served God (John 6:38) and so does the Army (John 20:21). The Army isn't just a "charity", its vision plan is: "One Army – A God-raised, Spirit-filled Army for the 21st century - convinced of our calling, moving forward together" and as such it does not serve people. We serve God. The service to people comes as a consequence of service to God. The reason for being and doing must be clearly understood. If the Army is to meet human needs in Jesus's way, it must do it for the same reason that Jesus did, which is in obedience to God.

To lose sight of this pivotal divine element is to blur the actions allowing the humanistic tendency to become donor or recipient driven and to lose sight of the prophetic dimension of service. In a post-modern society where secularization tends to undermine and to weaken the divine, the way the Army understands its nature is fundamental for its continuation.

### Clarity of doing

As the Army seeks to serve in Christ's name it has to do it with the same manner that Jesus did. Jesus served to unfold God's salvation plan to people as he brought about reconciliation to God (2 Corinthians 5:18).

As sin entered the world relationships were severely affected and broken: relationship to God, relationship to self, and relationship to others (people and nature)! Reconciliation

enables the restoration of these relationships. Although a consequence of reconciliation the latter two relationships are often referred as re-socialisation.

To enable re-socialisation only is to fall short of the goal. To enable restoration of relationships to self and to others (people and nature) is certainly necessary, meaningful and plausible however it is not enough. To serve as Jesus did means to go beyond and enable the restoration of relationships of people to God.

For Jesus, mission was to bring about reconciliation. For the Army it means to promote community development as the transformation process through which communities and its people have their capacity potentials maximised and are encouraged to take ownership of their own destiny, including capacity to relate to God, capacity to relate to self and capacity to relate to others.

The vision plan also states: "One Mission - Into the world of the hurting, broken, lonely, dispossessed and lost, reaching them in love by all means"

#### Clarity of saying

For the Army to serve like Jesus did, it needs to communicate like he did. Jesus was an excellent communicator who taught the crowds through simple every day stories and parables. Using everyday situations known to all he explained profound eternal truths that would forever change people's lives. He anchored what he intended to say and teach to common situations that all could understand and follow.

However Jesus not only proclaimed the message through interesting and captivating words that everyone could understand, and apply to their lives, but he became the message himself. Living out exactly what he wished people to learn.

In a post-modern society where people are bombarded with information and want to exert their right of choice, to be able to communicate and personify the message to be clearly understood is vital.

No wonder the vision plan envisions: "One Message – With the transforming message of Jesus, bringing freedom, hope and life".

#### **Conclusion**

As we attempt to serve suffering humanity in the 21st century in the way Jesus would it is necessary to understand poverty in broader terms than just lack of material resources. Poverty can be defined as the eroded systemic and personal conditions produced by on-going broken, unhealthy or non-existent vital relationships, including and foremost the relationship to God, to self, to others and nature.

This view helps to understand that the poor are not only the ones that lack material resources and that poverty alleviation does not happen by offering hand-outs. This understanding allows us to comprehend that we are all in need of reconciliation and that we are all interdependent.

Yes! People can be reconciled to God still today!

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