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GLOBAL CONVERSATION SESSION 3A
“How does serving suffering humanity transform people as disciples?”

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Introduction

The Lord Jesus has come in to the world to accomplish a mission that is clearly expressed in Luke 4: 18- 19 that says:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour”.

This mission includes both spiritual and social dimensions. It implies that Jesus came to save the lost from all kind of poverty.

The Lord’s mission must become the mission of the church. He sends the church with the great commission whose content is ‘disciple-making’. To be faithful and successful in accomplishing that mission we have to proclaim redemption and freedom to those who suffer in the slavery of sin and help them to get abundant life in every dimension of their lives. I mean that our mission has to be integral.

Integral Mission

The integral mission is the proclamation and the demonstration of the gospel. Proclamation and demonstration both converge to bring social consequences as we call people to repentance and make spiritual impact in the lives of those to whom we bear witness of the love and grace of Christ.

General William Booth understood his calling to embrace that part of the evangelism which is so often neglected by the traditional church. The Salvation Army ties its spiritual mission with social actions. Man has two needs. If we focus only on the spiritual aspect and neglect the social, the work is not complete. If we focus on the social aspect and neglect the spiritual, the work is not complete. Evangelism is an invitation to become a heavenly citizen, while the social mission is helping people to be proud of being part of their society. The social and the spiritual mission of the church cannot be separated. We cannot expect the spiritual transformation of someone if we ignore the other aspects of his life.

A great example is found in Acts 3:1-16 the story of the healing of the crippled man at the door of the temple. The problems of that man were tridimensional: Physical, social and spiritual. To survive, he had to go out to beg, for he could not help himself. He depended on

others to carry him and put him at the door of the temple every day. Every day he was at the door of the temple; but he couldn't get in to worship as others did. The apostles Peter and John coming to the temple were concerned about his physical situation. They acted in the name of Jesus to heal him. As soon as he got healed he entered the temple to praise God among other believers. He was proud of becoming active in his socio-spiritual community. That healing gave opportunity to the apostles to talk about Jesus to those who witnessed the miracle.

By caring for others we can bring many to Christ and many grow as disciples. In Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, The Salvation Army is achieving our mission – in terms of serving suffering humanity – by rescuing 464 young women from the shameful situation of sex-trafficking. These women have been trained in dressmaking, hairdressing and business management, and as a result they have given up prostitution and started a new life. A number have been saved and two of them have answered to call for officership. They are currently second year Cadets and will be commissioned next June. The change that occurred in the lives of these girls brings their parents and other people in the community to know Jesus as Saviour. **Through serving suffering humanity people can become disciples and help others to be saved and follow Jesus.**

The way these women are rescued needs to be understood. Our officers and staff start by getting to know the women while they are still working on the streets. Before we offer them the training course, we build a relationship with them and try to reconcile them with their families. Once the women stop their sex work, they can start the training courses. This is a comprehensive approach – relationship building and restoration with family; turning away from immoral work; learning a new skill; many also develop a new spiritual life with Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

The Salvation Army needs to keep up in the battle by directly targeting poverty that is the source of the sex trafficking and other vices that ruin the society. The battle might be tough but we have to engage ourselves in it. That is our mission. We cannot ignore the work of some philanthropic organizations in the communities. However, Jesus has called us for a special mission. He calls us to be fishers of men. At this level, we owe to the needy what we cannot expect them to receive from other organizations.

God has always considered people as a whole. According to the story of creation, there was no lack of food in the garden where God had placed Adam and Eve. Everything was in place before He created them. The book of Exodus tells us that Yahweh did not only promise freedom to the Jews but also a land where honey and milk would overflow. This means that God cares for our well-being in this world while He wants us to be in perfect relationship with Him. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus taught us to plead for forgiveness of sin in order to access heaven and to pray for daily bread that will keep us healthy and physically strong. So, we can deduce that the Lord's Prayer is an expression of the integral gospel.

The Church and its Mission

Obviously, a Christian cannot live without Christ. His life is senseless without the capacity to show his concern for his fellow men. Being saved does not mean maintaining relationship

with God and forgetting about others. The Apostle John treats as liars those who would think it so (1 John 4: 20 & 21).

The Christian doctrine implies two major points: Obedience to the Lord and love expressed to men. No one can show his obedience to Christ without expressing his love to his neighbour. The great example is found in the parable of Good Samaritan. At the end of the parable Jesus said: "Go and do likewise." This means that the gospel needs to be both proclaimed and also demonstrated by our deeds. Preaching the gospel in his fullness means that both must walk together. We cannot pretend to be faithful to the word of God if we are not available for men in their social needs. Our social work cannot be effective if it is not motivated by the love of God through our faith in Him.

The church must fulfill its mission by maintaining a proper balance between evangelism, discipleship and other dimensions of the Christian mission in its socio-economic aspects. The scriptures speak about a new heaven and a new earth. It is a way of viewing the Christian mission with holistic eyes. The gospel does not limit salvation only to the soul. Salvation is the transformation of the whole person in order to glorify the Lord with his whole being. So, the church has to speak of sin in terms of personal offence against God and act in social categories that affect people and nature.

Evangelism does not mean only the verbalization of God's love, but a practical demonstration of that love as well. General William Booth understood this and expressed in his famous declaration:

*While women weep, as they do now, I'll fight
while little children go hungry, as they do now, I'll fight
While men go to prison, in and out, in and out, as they do now, I'll fight
While there is a drunkard left,
While there is a poor lost girl upon the streets,
While there remains one dark soul without the light of God,
I'll fight, I'll fight to the very end!*

This was the expression of his vision to bring man to a social transformation that would be complete when his soul is being saved spiritually.

The Salvation Army is engaged in a war to change the world. It is the responsibility of every Salvationist to share the good news of salvation in practical ways. How can someone whose stomach is empty be attentive to a sermon? How can someone respond to a message on Sunday when he cannot afford to pay his children's school fees on Monday or feed them on the weekday? The church has to understand these questions and try to bring the answers. It is not sufficient to talk about love for others but it must be shown in deeds to them. As Salvationists, we are called to serve others because we are God's hands and feet in the world. The human race was in danger; nothing could escape from the wrath of God, the Father. Jesus came! He gave His own life to pay the penalty for our sin. Therefore, Christians must not miss any opportunity to act where there is a need.

As Salvationists, we are committed to the Lord as well as to people. We have to be concerned about the well-being of man as a whole. No one can give a better explanation of the integral gospel than the Apostle James does in his epistle (2:14) which says: "What's the use of saying that you have faith and are Christians if you aren't proving it by helping others?"

Surely, salvation can't be gained by deeds or loving action, but it is a way to show our faith to the Lord. Faith is the means of our salvation whose deed is the demonstration. In Matthew 25: 35-46, Jesus said: "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of these brothers of mine, and you did for me".

Jesus expresses clearly throughout the gospels his concerns for man as a whole. The holistic Gospel is from Christ. At the Calvary, He has paid our deserved penalty by his blood. He has opened the door of reconciliation to anyone by the sacrifice of his life. So, the gospel that implies our responsibility toward God and men has to be preached without distortion. We are the Lord's agents and, as such, we have to fulfill our task of preaching the integral gospel.

The Church and the Community

The church cannot be proud about fulfilling its mission while people around it are suffering. The young people, the future of the society, become drug and alcohol addicts because their future is uncertain. Many of the young girls get engaged in sex trafficking because they are hopeless. Many of them are victims of the society. Some are being abused and may become stigmatized for life. We must take the declaration of the founder as our motive. We have to fight! We have to fight against all kind of evils in the world. God calls us to be a new creation. This does not mean to show indifference towards the rest of the world. We make allegiance to Christ as Lord and Savior, but still living in the community. We have to balance our relationship with God as both spiritual beings and human/social beings. The church will become just a religious club if our mission is not integral. The church must not be seen as an isolated religious institution but as part of the community. It must make basic human needs our own business. The church must take ownership of our community problems.

God gave the ultimate example by His incarnation. He made men's problems His and gave His only begotten Son's life to pay our debt. As part of the community, the church must work with people by helping them to identify their real needs in order to face the daily life situation. The first mission of the church is to announce the coming of the kingdom of God. Our task is to tell about the saving grace of Christ Jesus. To be faithful to that mission the church must combine the praising to God and good deeds to men. As our slogan goes: "Heart to God, Hand to man".

The mission cannot become real unless we see people as whole beings and become convinced that they must be saved socio-economically by looking forward to entering the kingdom of God in heaven. In Luke 9:10-17, the Lord fed the multitudes after proclaiming salvation to them and healing those who needed to be healed. Christ's mission does not have only the unique purpose of changing people's spiritual life but also bringing fullness of life. The church must focus on the transformation of man in every aspect of life as a prelude of entering the Kingdom of God.

William Booth has understood salvation as a radical transformation and freedom from all kind of misery of this world. For him preaching the gospel did not mean focusing on the heavenly reward and closing the eyes on the earthly problems. That kind of gospel is not Christ-like. The full gospel is preaching that Christ has died for our sins and meeting the social needs of people out of a loving heart.

CONCLUSION

We all agree that the mission of the church is to bring people to Christ in order to rescue them from the eternal damnation. However, we have to keep in mind that man, as a trinity, (body, soul, spirit) cannot be happy if one of them is suffering. Preaching the gospel is not only talking about the spiritual need of people, but their social and material needs as well. If not, the church has failed in its mission that is: ***Bringing the whole gospel to the whole world in order to save the whole man and liberate the whole creation.***