

# **The Uses of Scripture in The Salvation Army**

*A thesis submitted to the Melbourne College of Divinity in  
Candidacy for the Master of Ministry Degree*

**by**

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## Introduction

The culture<sup>1</sup> of The Salvation Army has surrounded and supported and suppressed me throughout my life. At the heart of this culture are its 11 Articles of Faith, the first of which reads:

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.<sup>2</sup>

The scriptures are thus honoured as the basis of christian life.

The issue of this project is to what degree and by what means this is the case within The Salvation Army and within my own ministry practice.

Within my experience the scriptures are a key point of entry into christian life and faith. In various ways the scriptures are honoured and used to mediate a saving and transforming experience of God, within the community of faith and by individuals. The question of how the scriptures work in this way was raised in me from a young age. Early years of ministry presented the challenge of responsible use of scripture in a more forceful way. To this end, following the required two year residential training for Salvation Army officers, I enrolled in Bachelor of Divinity studies and enjoyed the wider world that opened up for me. My aim in these studies was to fill out the ‘kit of

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<sup>1</sup> Culture has been likened to the sea in which the fish swims: without it the fish has no existence, it supports every aspect of the life of the fish, and the fish lives and moves within it generally unaware of it until removed.

tools' for ministry, and in this and other pastoral experiences I recognise myself as moving from a somewhat dogmatic, authoritarian approach to understanding scripture as gracious invitation.

The M.Min programme has proved to be very helpful in identifying many of the threads of my ministry style, and been useful for weaving those threads into a serviceable, fairly comfortable, and even attractive fabric. The processes of the course have created breathing space from the insistent demands of Salvation Army ministry, and allowed matters of substance and passion to surface.

With this project in mind, I took the opportunity offered in an appointment to The Salvation Army's International College for Officers to conduct a questionnaire among colleagues from across the world. In hindsight I recognise that this questionnaire pushed me in two contrasting directions:

- forward beyond a potential preoccupation with biblical method, setting the scene for a more comprehensive study of hermeneutics;
- backwards, reluctantly, to a question never far away: How do I work alongside colleagues and comrades who cling to a more dogmatic, authoritarian style? This question is most clearly formed in use of scripture, but spills over inevitably into all areas of ministry.

A hermeneutics reading course was exciting in pointing to understandings of my own experience. With the benefit of reflection this theoretical underpinning sits well

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<sup>2</sup> Handbook of Doctrine, Salvationist Publishing and Supplies, 1969, p ix. This is the current official statement of Salvationist doctrine.

alongside the insights of Denham Grierson<sup>3</sup> for understanding aspects of pragmatic ministry - discovering and using openings for ministry in a local context. These two formal courses have been of enormous value to me.

Two series of Bible Schools conducted within my local congregation became the raw material for qualitative research into the way scripture shapes and resources my ministry. I discover that I have become a competent practitioner in the use of scripture in preaching and teaching, sometimes with profound results in the lives of others. My insights into the nature and function of scripture are also shaping my responses in the help of people in one-to-one pastoral settings.

The larger questions emerging from this research address my own ministry formation. This personal journey occurs within a particular ministry context, of denomination, colleagues, family, local congregation, friends. What does it mean to belong within The Salvation Army, with its particular ethos and its growing diversity, at this almost 'adolescent' phase of its development. I have always been surprised by frequent comment from staff and student colleagues while doing M.Min studies, as they have wondered where I fit within The Salvation Army. I have felt, and still feel, at home in the Army; focussed in certain areas, but feeling neither odd nor strange. Thoughtful 'outsiders' have expressed surprise with my on-going commitment within the Army, as though I should be incompatible with it. Perhaps I have ignored and overlooked points of difficulty and discontinuity; I rather suspect that the outsider's view is anachronistic. However, I do need to enter into more open dialogue with this church

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<sup>3</sup> Grierson, D.A., *Transforming a People of God*, JBCE, 1984

This book, and a study programme under the same title, have been tremendously useful to me in naming and understanding how we live as a community of God's people in local churches.

that has shaped and sustained me to recognise where it may also suppress. This is important for me, and it is crucial for the ‘second half’ of ministry that I am entering.

This project has prompted this reflection on ministry to date, and caused me to look to the questions that lie ahead in the next two decades of ministry. **I discover that the practice of ministry is applied hermeneutics.** I can trace where this has been the case for me, and am left with clearer questions as to what it will mean for the years to come.

## **PART A**

### *Using Scripture in The Salvation Army*

## Chapter One

# **The Scriptures and The Salvation Army**

### *A personal journey*

Amongst a kaleidoscope of childhood impressions “The Work” remains a deeply embedded memory. Life was always busy for my Salvation Army Officer parents, generally stressful, often very hard financially. For me, the middle of five children, it was also very rich. However, many of the decisions regarding family life - where we lived, who our friends were, the sports we could participate in, even the destination for a public holiday picnic - were governed by the needs of “The Work”.

“The Work” was both parents’ ministry, equally ordained, equally involved, but with mum also maintaining the homefront to allow dad to “get on with it”. This ministry was generally local Corps work: worship, preaching, pastoral care and discipline, administration and smooth running; each parent passionately convinced that this was God’s specific calling on their life, on their life together, and for their family. This is the cultural ‘sea’ in which I swam and grew.

For my seventh birthday I followed the pattern of my two older sisters in receiving a black, leather covered, gold embossed “Holy Bible”. It was expected, and I was pleased to receive such a significant item, even if the Elizabethan English was not what I was reading at school. I think that I sensed a symbolic value, an invitation into

a centre of meaning. Here was a personal entry point into the centre of the culture that shaped and sustained me.

I had received the unequivocal message that this book was central, special, formative, life giving and enriching. It was read from and preached about in the three public adult meetings that we attended every Sunday. It was echoed in lines of songs and choruses, sung with quiet devotion or with expressive enthusiasm. Verses, often judgement but also words of grace and invitation, were declared with fervour from the Open Air Meeting to a largely indifferent public. Stories flowed from it in the Sunday School setting, and doctrinal derivations were revealed in the weekly Directory class. Mum and dad were observed to read it during the week, and verses were plucked at random from the Promise Box at the end of our main meal together.

I now had my own copy of the bible, a personal invitation to the deeper life that was around me. I tried to read this impressive black book from the beginning, the place where all books started. I didn't get far.

Other means continued to have effect.

The pages with coloured pictures in my bible directed my attention to some stories and ideas.

I clearly remember reading the book of Esther as a family around the table following meals. We may have read other parts, but this story certainly went deeper for me than the random selection of a promise.

King James Version psalms, chanted responsively in Sunday School days, still come to mind readily.

I had my own personal key to the meaning and substance that shaped my life, but I was quietly disappointed in my inability to make use of it. I think I felt personally responsible for this inability, although I also knew that Scripture was taking root within me through all those other means. There were no helps for personal use available to me as far as I can remember.

# # # #

As I reflect on this childhood time it is clear that the Scriptures assumed a place of importance for me. They were integrally linked with the culture that shaped and sustained me. This is evident in the impact of the seventh birthday present, this symbolic personal invitation into the faith and culture of my main community.

My hermeneutic at this stage was caught from the family and Corps environments, but not uncritically so.

An authority of scripture was implicit in worship and Christian education. Singing and stories, preaching and prayers seemed to emerge from it. At this distance I recognise that the scriptures were important, even central, in the local Corps. There was a

reverent hush when they were read in public. The physical books were handled carefully. The scriptures had authority.

How this authority operated in the lives of the people is more difficult to judge, and I am not aware that the question was ever raised among the rank and file. Quite rightly The Salvation Army has never made any particular understanding of inspiration and authority binding.<sup>4</sup> However the impression gained from Sunday School teachers and from Corps folk sharing in public testimony and using the bible in public is that the scriptures were inerrant and in theory at least held an absolute authority.

I recognised a 'personal access' to scripture by significant people (parents, who used it at home and declared it from the pulpit), and sought in some way to discover that for myself. Somewhat disappointed, but not deterred, I continued to absorb scripture as mediated within the community of faith.

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<sup>4</sup> Handbook of Doctrine, The Salvation Army, 1969, ch 2, pp 7-27.

p 9 reads:

The Doctrine of the inspiration of the Scriptures does not mean verbal dictation. Such a theory leaves out of account the human element in the composition of the Scriptures ... it would also involve the need to ascribe finality to stages of revelation that are incomplete.

The Holy Spirit endowed His messengers with insight to interpret for our profit the events through which God disclosed His will to men.

p 80 concludes with a delightfully diplomatic comment: "Whether the Genesis account is taken literally or as a revelation in parable form of eternal truth, the story of the Fall teaches certain undeniable truths of life and history: ..."

A.G. Cunningham, *The Bible: Its Divine Revelation, Inspiration and Authority*, pp 41ff

The impact of narrative in the reading of Esther is notable, especially when contrasted with the effect of the Promise Box.<sup>5</sup> I see here the emergence of critical faculties.

Pictorial representation of biblical text also gave some access to that text, consistent with my own stage of intellectual and social development.

As a child I met with God and experienced grace, mediated in large part through Scripture.

# # # #

University, and second year of studies in particular, brought the challenge of critical thought sharply into focus. It was the late 60's and early 70's. Campuses were in ferment. Long-standing institutions of government were being challenged: sit-ins at the university, radical change in my home state of South Australia, resistance to Australian involvement in the Vietnam war. The contraceptive pill, widespread use of hallucinogenic drugs, women's rights movements; institutions of society that had seemed so permanent were challenged and changing. Alvin Toffler introduced us to the concept of "future shock".

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<sup>5</sup> I can now almost enjoy dipping into a Promise Box. I'll take that up later in discussion of Ricoeur and Gadamer.

My own intellectual and social life was developing within the context of these other radical changes. The old authorities spoke less convincingly and the quest for personal access to centres of meaning became more urgent. Many of my friends at university were part of the same worshipping community. It was a delight to have company on the quest - maybe it made it easier?

On reflection, I engaged this quest for “faith owned”<sup>6</sup> seeking to ‘stay within’ the faith. The old authorities obviously still spoke convincingly. Conversation with friends, counsel with learned adults, fervent prayer by parents and parents of friends - these all assisted this university group of pilgrims.

One response I made soon after this time of crisis, and after a further rigorous though unsuccessful effort at personal devotional reading of scripture, was to invite a group of friends and associates to my house for group bible study. Again, I recognised scripture to be important for spiritual nurture, and again the loneliness of the solitary task was relieved and enriched by the corporate setting.

Together we made effort to get behind the text, to discover context, to understand time and space conditioned meanings. This was not simply intellectual interest but a deep desire to own our own faith and nurture it.

Two important results emerged:

- the group operated, with small turnover in people, for three years.
- it proved crucial for me in establishing a faith that was not embarrassing at work as an engineer. It enabled me to enter training for professional ministry having cleared up any suspicions I might have carried that I was escaping from the ‘real world’, where faith made no sense, into a world of institutionalised faith, into professional ministry.

# # # #

The required two year residential training at The Salvation Army Training College was undemanding. I did profit greatly from the half hour scheduled daily for private prayer. In it I experienced various ways into prayer, and discovered the refreshment of meditation - a sense of being in the immediate presence of God. This was valuable at the time, and more valuable for the possibilities it indicates for everyday.

College opened a few small doors for my developing hermeneutic. I gained some sense of the literary range of biblical materials, the sweep of biblical history, and the overall theme of God, people, and salvation. Standard questions of date, authorship, composition and theological themes sharpened critical awareness, especially in areas such as Pentateuch, synoptic gospels, apocalyptic etc. Brief coverage of Genesis 1-11 signalled possibilities.

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<sup>6</sup> This idea is expressed helpfully by John Westerhoff III in *Will Our Children Have Faith?*.

Within a year of commissioning I enrolled for Bachelor of Divinity studies. I wanted to develop my kit of tools for ministry. I greeted Old Testament 1 and New Testament 1 (Greek) with enthusiasm. There was some shock also as I encountered historical-critical method closely, meeting the academic rigour and intensity of Athol Gill and the passion of Terry Falla. However, it was meat and drink to me. Tentative use of these tools promised to uncover meaning and substance - stuff to sustain me, something to say from the pulpit, insights to help accompany and name the journey of the flock.

The transition was a welcome shock. I resonated deeply with the objectives of historical-critical method and enjoyed many of the outcomes, but they were a long way from the expectations and previous experience of most Salvationists. I look back over old sermons and trace a growing facility. There are pleasing surprises - some of the quality is good. With some old sermons I blush and salute those who endured without much complaint. It takes years for the fruit of academic theology to ripen in me. At the same time I sensed something happening for thoughtful people, and this continues to occur. They recognise a climate of openness, permission to ask questions, to scream against the inadequate and simplistic decrees that have not taken them seriously. This disturbs them for a period of time but repeatedly they move forward with great joy.

The mixture of discomfort and 'aha' joy was particularly noticeable when I was appointed to the teaching staff of the Training College. Where in preaching and pastoral work I was pleased to share the fruit of method in interpretation of scripture, I

now faced the choice, the somewhat subversive choice, and the challenge of introducing the newly-learned tools and methods. The range of experience and openness among the Cadets was daunting. Some could not cope. Some after considerable struggle eventually thanked me. For others it was “water in a dry land”<sup>7</sup>. For me it is what I would have liked at Training College, and having crossed the historical-critical divide I really could not do it any other way. At no time did I think that this was the only way into the meaning of scripture, but I did come with the enthusiasm of a new convert.

Return to local Corps work encouraged a further development in my use of scripture. I experimented with the Common Lectionary as guide to preaching. This experiment quickly became part of the joint ministry with my wife. We detected an accumulated wisdom in the cycle of readings, especially as we travelled outside customary texts. We enjoyed the fact that the preaching subject was decided for us in advance, and with it came a host of helps and resources for worship and preaching. The task did not seem as lonely. It became a lot easier to integrate and develop a hermeneutic in company and discussion with others.

Other noticeable developments emerge in pastoral care, church discipline and bible studies. A growing understanding of revelation and authority of scripture, moving away from the somewhat authoritarian, dogmatic style absorbed in earlier years towards a recognition of scripture as God’s gracious invitation to all, helped me treat myself and others more kindly. There is in many, perhaps more so in my theological

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<sup>7</sup> Quoting Jennifer Hull, a Cadet in training at the time.

tradition, a perfectionist drive that is severe on human failing and that encourages personal effort to be 'good enough' to be acceptable by God. I observe that this keeps many from resting in gracious acceptance by God. Some of this tendency seems to be linked to a narrow and dogmatic hermeneutic.

This applies also in discipline. I have moved from an initially legalistic response to a response that firstly considers the pastoral realities and needs of the individuals. The rules and principles gathered from scripture stand to remind us of the need for pastoral action, and occasionally of the need for sanctions to be applied. This change emerges from a growing understanding of the nature and activity of God that arises out of a developing hermeneutic, a move from legalism to gracious invitation. I suspect that hermeneutic style is crucial.

Specific bible study activity is obviously transformed by developing hermeneutic style and will be the major subject in Part B of this project.

In the changes taking place for me, I was greatly supported and encouraged, more than I knew at the time, by the openness of my wife to share the questions. The importance of this is highlighted in the joint ministry requirements within The Salvation Army. The climate in my denomination does not actively encourage theological investigation, indeed some individuals seem threatened by it. Company and dialogue help enormously, and are essential in any joint ministry.

## Chapter Two

### **The Questionnaire**

#### *Comparing the journey*

An appointment to a two month session at the International College for Officers offered a unique opportunity to compare my understandings and experience with those of a wide range of fellow officers. The ICO session gathered 24 people from 14 countries. The small faculty was supplemented by guest presenters. Being in London gave access to many of the Army's creative thinkers and writers in the field of bible and interpretation. Despite the very early stage in the Master of Ministry programme, I took this opportunity to construct a questionnaire incorporating issues of significance to me, and through various means was able to interview forty five people. The questionnaire appears as Appendix 1.

Almost without exception<sup>8</sup> people were delighted to be interviewed, pleased to be listened to and taken seriously, stimulated by this encouragement to think through the issues. In nearly all cases the 30 minutes requested for interview grew into 60-90 minutes, and that extension was not really my doing. All were happy to be quoted directly from the survey.

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<sup>8</sup> Having initially agreed, Clifford Kew asked to be excused on the grounds of health and busyness.

Of the forty five people interviewed, twenty three were delegates or staff at the ICO, representing 14 countries - Pakistan, Zimbabwe, Philippines, India, Korea, Brazil (3), South Africa, Australia, USA (4 plus 1 staff), Canada (2 plus 1 staff), UK (2), Switzerland, Netherlands, and Sweden. Twenty were officers stationed in the UK, most of whom have completed formal tertiary studies, and many of whom have been published as writers within The Salvation Army. One was then the Territorial Commander (the overall leader) in the UK. Others included Corps Officers, counsellors, social services and administrative appointments. I included two lay Salvationists, sisters aged 18 and 25, one completing tertiary study and the other about to commence. Each had taken Religious Studies in their final years of Secondary School.

### ***The questions and responses:***

The context of the questionnaire was established with the following:

#### **THE USE OF THE SCRIPTURES IN THE SALVATION ARMY**

An exploration of the first article of faith:

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.

How is this understood and used by Salvationists?

How might we apply this article of faith fruitfully in days to come?

The questions followed:

**A 1. In the lives of Salvationists generally, what activities are most important in shaping us as Christians?**

This question was intended to allow a range of influences for shaping christian life to be tabled.

Public worship and small group activities stood out strongly. The various elements of worship were recognised - preaching, prayer, singing, personal testimony, reading of scripture. Small groups included structured learning opportunities for young people - Junior Soldiers and Corps Cadets - but referred mainly to a growing trend towards home fellowship/bible study groups for adults. These adult groups were seen as important signs of life across the world.

Music and singing remains an important formative influence, as do service and the example/witness of other people (especially on a one-to-one basis). Simply being together in fellowship and absorbing the sub-culture was recognised as a major formative influence.

Implicit in these responses and explicit in the next question is the strong sense that personal systematic study use of scripture is not very widespread. Much scriptural influence is mediated through other means and people. While personal devotional use is generally honoured as important it did not rate highly as a response to this question. Family devotions received some mentions.

**B With regard to the impact of the Scriptures in the lives of Salvationists:**

**1. To what extent is our faith shaped and formed by the Scriptures?**

This question was intended to sharpen the focus on the place of scripture in faith formation of Salvationists. The typical response went something like:

“Yes, it is, but the scriptures are mediated through other people or forms.”

Other interesting responses: “We are not always personal friends with the scriptures.”

“There is a cry for an authentic encounter with the Word.”

The Songbook was recognised as an important meeting place with the message of scripture.

One response stated that for thinking Salvationists the scriptures were consistently useful.

A sobering comment from Zimbabwe reminded us that having a leader who could read was crucial! From Third World settings preaching, group bible study and singing were cited.

**B With regard to the impact of the Scriptures in the lives of Salvationists:**

**2. In what ways do the Scriptures shape our Christian practice?**

- a. Personal**
- b. Corporate**

This question was intended to sharpen the focus on the place of scripture in the formation of christian practice in Salvationists and in The Salvation Army corporately.

The range of responses was much narrower here. In personal formation it was felt that there is a general willingness for the scriptures to be the major formative influence, but that this was still a mediated influence except where personal reading was encouraged. There is a strong 'ethos' within The Salvation Army which is very influential, and this ethos is understood to be grounded in scripture. The two girls made the illuminating response that "It is difficult because, while the scriptures are important in christian practice, they don't seem to be made central.." <sup>9</sup>

With regard to The Salvation Army corporately, many thought a scriptural basis was implicit - "deep within the culture" - but not always evident. Most thought that pragmatism is the dominant style. Interestingly the question was nearly always interpreted to refer to organisational and management style of The Salvation Army rather than ethical and prophetic responses. There was some reference back to the scriptures underpinning worship. There was surprisingly little linkage between The Salvation Army's social welfare work and our basis in Scripture. I sense an urgent and important need for a clear and contemporary statement of theological underpinnings for our welfare work. Again, the small group bible study is seen as a sign of hope for developing an explicit scriptural basis for corporate practice.

**B With regard to the impact of the Scriptures in the lives of Salvationists:**

**3. What are some of the questions and issues that you think are important for Salvationists with regard to the Scriptures?**

The overwhelming response was for life-related exposition on christian living. This is really no surprise - we all want it, and want to be able to do it! At the same time a number thought that many Salvationists were content to remain naive on the deeper questions of scripture and interpretation.

Two very useful questions were posed:

Why do (Army) leaders know so little (of the scriptures)?

Why is the authority of scripture ignored?

A case remains to be made to support the assertions implicit in these questions, but the disturbing effect of the questions lingers.

Suitable helps for bible reading and study; prayer as a context for bible reading; the need to understand the big biblical picture; and the corresponding concern that extreme issues sometimes dominate the central issues, were all mentioned twice.

Inspiration, authority and inerrancy was also mentioned twice as an issue especially important in North America (not by North Americans, and with disapproval of what was understood as “conservative extremism”).

Many other issues, in a wide spread, were mentioned once.

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<sup>9</sup> Sarah Mitchell interview, supported with comment from her older sister Kate (in separate interview).

The summary of this is simple - the hermeneutical question is alive and well.

**C Please share your understanding of our first doctrine especially with regard to the phrases**

**1. “... inspiration of God ...”**

Most were very prompt to clarify that this did not mean verbal, inerrant literalism - “literalism of this sort makes God too small”.<sup>10</sup> All were equally keen to express some sense in which God has breathed into these particular words.

For some this is seen in the impact for salvation within the reader - “inspired because inspiring”, linked with the ultimate reality (God) etc., although one (North American) specifically spoke against this.

A significant number (6) understood the process of inspiration as a person or people recognising the authentic action of God in their times.

“It tells the story of some who took God seriously. God is the one who appears from cover to cover. (It is) not dictated, but special, inspired in its overall impact.”<sup>11</sup>

“... it is the record of God’s revelation of himself to men and women and that the bible writers have expressed that revelation through their own personality. I experience insights and revelations in reading scripture and hearing it expounded - inspiration is not just a theory - as an African woman once said, ‘This book reads me!’”<sup>12</sup>

Any support for verbal dictation came from North America. For one, “Very literal, each word, all parts. Human personality, including translation, with Divine control.

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<sup>10</sup> Miriam Fredrickson, interview

<sup>11</sup> Keith Banks, interview

<sup>12</sup> Kenneth Lawson, interview

God oversees the writing and transmission.”<sup>13</sup> For another, “God directed men to write but allowed expression of their own personality. It is the direct word of God where gross errors are avoided.”<sup>14</sup> For another, “Not dictation, but active inspiration. God oversaw the process to ensure that it was ‘true’.”<sup>15</sup> Three are represented in this comment, “God moved people to write (not stenographers) in the space-time events of life. Human personality is left in the record. The major issues are without error.”<sup>16</sup> The final representative from North America would distance herself from those opinions expressed above as being too fundamentalist, “God is the God of history and works where his people are, speaks to those who are listening. There is miracle as God is dealing with people. I can’t be extreme fundamentalist.”<sup>17</sup>

Those from Brazil understood that in their country there is much unthinking adherence to fundamentalism, but that they see the scriptures as “not dictated, but Holy Spirit guided”.<sup>18</sup> In India it was suggested that people would see the bible as a “holy” book and that God speaks directly through it.

**C Please share your understanding of our first doctrine especially with regard to the phrases**

**2. “... they only constitute the Divine rule ...”**

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<sup>13</sup> Alf Richardson, interview

<sup>14</sup> Harold Robbins, interview

<sup>15</sup> Ron Busroe, interview

<sup>16</sup> Wes Sundin, interview

<sup>17</sup> Sharon Berry, interview

<sup>18</sup> Paolo Rangel, interview.

This was readily and generally understood as the scriptures being the rule as in measuring stick, not rule as in orders and regulations; the “ultimate guide”, sufficient as the final guide. There was the warning that scripture is not above God, but it does stand over Church, Tradition(s) and personalist interpretations.

I expected this phrase to be more controversial and provide more varied responses than was the case, especially from the more conservative responses above. I sense Salvation Army pragmatism emerging again!

**D With regard to interpretation**

**1. What issues are important?**

The leading comment was the need to set scripture in context, in some with specific use of historical-critical tools. Context included the wider testimony of scripture, as well as the meaning in the place and time of writing. Some stressed that the plain meaning, or common sense meaning should be sought, keeping in mind the large themes of scripture - Jesus Christ, redemption, etc.

Many were aware of the need to be aware of our own context as reader, and this was developed more in question D.5. This concern is also expressed in the need for current relevance in application.

A number also stressed the need for prayerful reading and humility in placing ourselves under the text.

These responses are as expected.

**D With regard to interpretation:**

**2. How would you describe your method of interpretation?**

There was very little evidence of thought-out method, and this was admitted to in a number of cases - “very shallow” was one disarming reply.<sup>19</sup> Some were aggressively literalist - “see the words, that’s the meaning”.

Where a method was outlined it generally followed the pattern:

read the text;  
context in scripture and history;  
words and phrases;  
application.

Commentaries are often used in the middle two steps.

The puzzle for me is how little conscious use of method is made, especially from those who obviously think systematically about scripture and its use. They know the methods but seem to ignore their use. Why?

Is it an unspoken dissatisfaction with method?

Is the gap between methodological theory and practice too large?

Is it lack of time?

At the time of interview I did not recognise these questions and unfortunately they were not raised.

**D With regard to interpretation:**

- 3. If you are familiar with the use of “historical-critical method”, please share any personal comments:**

Seven of the respondents affirmed historical-critical method as liberating and faith-strengthening, several others identified it as “helpful”. One quoted Stephen Neill:

If the Bible is inspired, its inspiration is likely to shine all the brighter as a result of patient, impartial, and ruthlessly honest critical work upon it.<sup>20</sup>

Two general warnings emerge:

- beware of mere mechanics
- method is not always productive for spiritual growth.

One of the younger girls had had some introduction in school studies and found it difficult to apply “because it’s so new and alien and there’s no one to talk with”. For her it was generally a bad experience with some valued “aha’s”.

A few thought it was impractical, for use only by specialists.

About five understood historical-critical method to be dangerous. One admitted some familiarity and continued: “I wouldn’t give a tinker’s damn for it. It doesn’t touch base for me.”<sup>21</sup> Method itself seemed to be the issue in some of these cases.

Third world respondents were sympathetic to the issues, as evidenced in earlier questions, but generally unfamiliar with the methods of criticism.

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<sup>19</sup> Ron Busroe, interview

<sup>20</sup> Cited by Genty Fairbank, interview, in reference to Stephen Neill, *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1961*.

To me there seemed to be some inconsistency between a willingness to acknowledge historical context but stand off from historical method.

I found this question very helpful for uncovering some of my prejudices (against those who reject historical-critical method outright) and uncertainties (How do we move beyond historical-critical method? How does simple devotional reading work? The scriptures obviously work for those unschooled in method, and have worked previously for 18 and more centuries - how?) It stirred me to develop further my own hermeneutical questions.

**D With regard to interpretation:**

**4. What part does faith play in the interpretation of Scripture?**

“From faith to faith” was the oft repeated quote. There was a ready understanding and acceptance of the “hermeneutic circle”. Faith precedes interpretation and leads to greater faith. Meaning is accessed via faith and deepens faith.

“It’s different from Shakespeare and Milton, I expect to encounter God, because I’ve done that (before).”<sup>22</sup>

This was a remarkably uniform response.

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<sup>21</sup> Wes Sundin, interview

<sup>22</sup> Chick Yuill, interview

**D With regard to interpretation**

**5. What important cultural emphases may shape us in our reading of Scripture?**

All agreed that local culture affects our reading greatly:

- things we see and things we miss in the text
- tradition, upbringing, politics, sexuality
- Salvation Army sub-culture
- non-apocalyptic, materialistic world view
- language, literacy, and local custom, eg polygamy
- strangeness of biblical images

Again, awareness of this sort sits strangely with those who advocate an uncritical reading of the text!

**D With regard to interpretation:**

**6. What influence should the Salvationist's community of faith have on individual interpretation?**

There was a general sense that we, The Salvation Army, have done well in having clear outlines of belief but at the same time allowing necessary freedom to explore and grow in faith. The 11 Articles of Faith and their brief exposition serve us well. I suspect that this comes from the wisdom of the early formulators of Salvationist

doctrine, and also from a general lack of interest in reflective theology in favour of pragmatic action.

There is a widespread feeling that we should not be tied down too tightly.

It is recognised also that interpretation is inevitably controlled inasmuch as it arises within a particular community of faith. There is also a hermeneutic circle between the community and the individual, with an honoured place for “loyal opposition”.

However, idiosyncratic interpretation should be held with humility.

The Brazilians cited John Wesley and William Booth: “In essentials, unity; In non-essentials, liberty; In everything, love.”

The Zimbabwean stressed the importance for him of the introduction to the Officer’s

Covenant: “Believing that God raised up The Salvation Army ...”, and that this legitimates an authority for this community of faith that should be recognised by

individuals within it.<sup>23</sup>

**E      1.      What reading has helped in shaping your understanding of Scripture and its use?**

A wide range of reading was cited, with very little repetition. The books suggested by ICO delegates were almost exclusively from conservative evangelical writers. Third world representatives were grateful to have access to ‘cast-offs’ from missionaries; they have very little to work with.

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<sup>23</sup> Francis Kawana, interview

Most of the reading would have been first published more than 20 years ago - we do seem to settle in with old favourites and remain comfortable with established patterns in our lives. The question sought to discover what reading was influential, and we can expect to be influenced most early in our time of study. However, even with allowance for the constraints within the question asked, given the sample I was interviewing, and their leadership within Army scholarship, the relative age of publications is notable. In an earlier response the need for a Sabbatical within Salvation Army conditions of service was raised. This suggestion is strongly supported by the frustration expressed in finding time to read, and by the relative age of publications read.

**E      2.      What are your favourite passages for personal use ...**

**for preaching ...**

For personal use the clear favourites are Psalms (22 of 45 responses) and John's Gospel (15 of 45 responses plus 6 references to the gospels generally) as first or second choice - this is no surprise. What is surprising is that neither of these emerge strongly for use in preaching. Overall the Old Testament is used much more personally than it is for preaching.

If all references to epistles are tallied - epistles generally, plus specific books, plus specific chapters - these are the most frequently used, both personally and for preaching. The Pauline corpus is most common, with reference to 1 John, James and

Hebrews also. The general nature of the question makes detailed analysis difficult, however, the ‘canon within the canon’ is at least hinted at.

There is more use of the Old Testament than I expected, although at approximately 20% not nearly equal to the New Testament.

Psalms and gospel narratives were very high for personal use. I sense people seeking out the more ‘relational’ material, expressive of human questing and joy and struggle. Yet the usage is not nearly as high in preaching. The inverse applies for the epistles with their doctrinal and parenetic style. Why is this so?

Is preaching perceived as more removed, less relational, more delivery at the other?

Is there embarrassment at the simplicity of the more human material, is it too self-revealing?

Fifteen or sixteen years ago, on holidays in a seaside town, I sat entranced by Dr Arthur Blanksby’s preaching of Psalm 121. It encouraged me to try preaching the Psalms, and they work every time, especially if the worship is formed around that Psalm also.

The use of the lectionary has brought me into habitual and comfortable use of the gospels in preaching. I delight to use the narrative framework to gently uncover meaning. Story works at many levels.

**F      What suggestions do you offer regarding the use of Scripture in The Salvation Army?**

‘Creativity’ was the loudest response, supported in at least three cases with large quantities of material produced in written and audio form<sup>24</sup>, and with the generous invitation to make full use of them. These materials were designed for use of scripture in congregational and group settings. Notable was the very successful effort to make an ally of music, a major influence within Salvation Army worship and pageantry, and often perceived as a competitor against scriptural influence.

Again, small groups were recognised as crucial and seen as a beacon of hope across the world that scripture can take deeper root within the people and the movement.

Textual rather than topical preaching, often expressed as expository preaching, was also strongly suggested.

One expression of this came from Brazil, where all four delegates disagreed with a traditional separation of ‘holiness’ and ‘salvation’ emphases in Salvationist worship, the disagreement arising in the fact that often both emphases are contained in the one text. They suggested three ways forward:

- the importance of officers preparing better, because the people don’t do it<sup>25</sup>
- give more time within the Corps calendar for teaching
- develop a christian education programme ‘from the cradle to the grave’

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<sup>24</sup> John Coutts, Keith Banks and Bill Metcalf especially, with smaller quantities from a number of others.

<sup>25</sup> The implication of this verbatim comment is that officers have a greater responsibility for biblical study than lay people because they have a better opportunity.

The need for systematic learning opportunities, such as Bible Schools, was emphasised. In Sweden, Confirmation Classes in a camping environment are built into the way of life and these become important study and learning milestones for the mid-teen years.

Creative resources for personal devotional use are also thought to be needed, beginning with encouragement simply to read or hear scripture.

Given its high profile within the ethos of The Salvation Army, devotional use of scripture has featured surprisingly little in responses overall. Many have suggested that personal devotional and study use of scripture is indeed disappointingly small.

I sense that Salvation Army officers would benefit greatly by seminar/conference opportunities to explore creative use of scripture. Would they come away from their busy lives? I'm not so sure.

Certainly in Britain there are some wonderful resources waiting to be called together.

# # # #

Comparing the journey using questionnaire and interview has been enjoyable and productive. People love to be asked questions and then be listened to. On reflection, I absorbed more from conducting these interviews than I knew at the time, some of which has subsequently found its way into my ministry, often unconsciously.

How does my experience of scripture compare with fellow Salvation Army officers?

I was encouraged that all responded to the subject with real passion, with the sense that we were sharing matters of substance. Perhaps they were responding in part to my own enthusiasm, but the interaction was far more energetic than that. The scriptures are understood to be at the heart of The Salvation Army, crucial to who we are and who we are to become. The symbolic importance of the 'Holy Bible' I received at age seven is perceived widely and felt deeply among officers. The scriptures are held to be central in forming, shaping and sustaining us, individually and corporately. Article of Faith number one lies deeply within Salvation Army self-consciousness.

I also see my journey in understanding the nature and inspiration and authority of scripture, and my quest for discovering meaning of scripture, echoed in the experience of others. Different people are at different stages, with some unfortunately locked into simplistic and dogmatic approaches, but with most engaging in lively debate with the written word from their ministry context.

Detailed issues arising from the questionnaire are summarised as follows:

1. personal systematic study use (and even devotional use) of scripture is not as widespread as respondents thought desirable. For many Salvationists scripture is mediated via other people and forms.

2. in this international movement vast differences continue to exist in the resources available for the study and use of scripture. This is an economics/social justice issue, a language/translation issue and a development of indigenous resources issue.
3. there is much to be done to relate The Salvation Army's social welfare identity explicitly to scripture. We need an explicit theology of welfare and social justice.
4. there is a loud and widespread cry for the scriptures to be more closely related to everyday life. The word 'hermeneutics' might not be widely understood, but the task is understood to be urgent.
5. 'inspiration' is generally understood as people of faith recognising God working within their time and place and giving testimony to that faith. There is also a significant number, in this sample originating in Salvationists from North America, who hold to some form of verbal inerrancy. There was a sense from other places also that this might be widely held at the lay level.
6. the 'rule' of scripture is perceived as a measuring stick rather than as a rod for people's backs.
7. conscious use of method features less strongly than expected for those of a more 'liberal' persuasion.
8. there seems to be an inconsistency in some who acknowledge historical context but distance themselves from any historical critical method.
9. it is widely understood that interpretation takes place from within a stance of faith, and that interpretation is an activity of faith.

10. biblical culture, local culture, and the culture of The Salvation Army must all be considered in interpretation.
11. influential reading was somewhat dated - perhaps to be expected as we are most influenced in our early encounter with a new field, but certainly because it is difficult to make time for reading.
12. there is an interesting gap between texts favoured for personal use and those used in preaching. Our understanding of preaching may be at the root of this, and stand against the stated concern for life-related use of scripture.
13. creativity in life-application of scripture, small groups, and 'expository' preaching are the areas most suggested for development within The Salvation Army.

I am left with the need to grapple with the dogmatic, authoritarian (largely North American) responses. This is also a reality of most ministry situations in which I find myself - some of the people I work with come with similar dogmatic approaches. I must firstly acknowledge that what works for them has also worked for me in the past. However I can no longer operate from this 'safe' position of clear and unambiguous certainties. Life as I experience it is far more 'rainbow' than these 'black and white' approaches allow, and the content and style of scripture finally calls me to a way of grace that is also multi-hued.<sup>26</sup> Where do I sit among these more dogmatic colleagues and flock? Do I leave them to it? Do I continue the conversation?

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<sup>26</sup> In pastoral and teaching settings this imagery has been very useful in calling people forward into new understandings.

Over the years I have sought, tentatively, to continue the conversation, especially in the local pastoral situation. I need to take more seriously the fact that what works for them now has worked for me in the past. This should encourage me to more patient listening in the dialogue.

At the same time, I am persuaded that my own journey has been appropriate, that my own efforts to engage ministry and scripture have been faithful to the gospel, and productive in my life and for others.

## Chapter Three

### **The M.Min Programme:**

#### *Reflecting on the journey*

With the completion of Bachelor of Divinity studies five years in the past I was ready for a framework for reflection on ministry to date, and for filling out and expanding aspects of that ministry. The objectives and design of the emerging Master of Ministry programme appealed greatly, especially study concurrent with ministry practice. The idea of a broader consideration of theological and sociological aspects of ministry as a prelude to focussing on a specific project also appealed.

Denham Grierson's *Transforming a People of God*<sup>27</sup> was a great start to the course work, and has germinated and provided confirmation from a different perspective for many of the learnings of this project. The dialogue of the Residential Schools and Collegium groups suited me well, as did the ecumenical richness of these processes. These methods of learning did demonstrate the self-revelation of God through people and processes as we studied ourselves in ministry. Theology should not be done in a vacuum, in theory, isolated from ministry practice. Academic disciplines must combine with reflection on practice, and vice versa.

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<sup>27</sup> Grierson, book and study course.

My project topic seemed to emerge from within a number of possibilities considered, and was confirmed in the theological reflection paper required for the final residential school. A reading course in hermeneutics completed the course work requirement and contributed directly to my thinking for the project.

### **The Hermeneutic Task**

The basic question is:

**How do we move from marks on a page to authoritative meaning and transforming effect in the reader?**

Orthodox christianity has always accepted a certain set of ‘marks on a page’ as authoritative for life and faith. How does this process work? What controls does it come under? How may the process be enhanced?

How do we move from marks on a page to authoritative meaning and transforming effect? A specific illustration may help:

A person shares with an "in-group" interests in rock music and motor bikes. He or she falls in love with someone from a different "in-group" with enthusiasm for classical music and furniture design. If the two are really "in love" each will discover that his or her horizons of existence and understanding are rapidly expanded.<sup>28</sup> Two worlds come together, each with their own horizon of vision, and there is understanding.

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<sup>28</sup> Adapted from A.C. Thisleton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, p. 609.

This very widely experienced event suggests a helpful metaphor for hermeneutics. A text<sup>29</sup> moves towards us, resonant with meaning, and we receive it with enthusiasm and joy. We are ready to listen to the text. In order to hear it better we then stand back and begin the hard work of historical critical study, to investigate background, to see the text in its own setting. We establish a distance from the text in order to hear it rather than hear only a projection of ourselves into it.

Students typically exit their theological colleges having completed some of this hard work in biblical study, but having also lost some of the pietistic enthusiasm of entry. In an effort to get behind the text to uncover its intention and meaning they have lost the capacity to sit in front of the text and be touched by its transforming power. Ahead is the preaching and pastoral task, the present devotional need remains urgent, but the text has been set at a distance to be studied and made use of. For many the text has become a desert. The two worlds have not yet come together.

Returning to our image of courtship, and extending it into marriage;

- the two are attracted, the stage characterised by enthusiasm and spontaneous joy
- Together, naively;
- then the early years of marriage, perhaps in the grind of house and job and the changing of nappies, we stand back and ask questions, "How did this happen? Is this all there is?" - Apart, under the same roof;
- a stage of further transformation remains, the confirmation of a deeper love, of intimacy, of knowing and being known at depth, two worlds coming together without the loss of either - Together, again.

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<sup>29</sup> 'Text' covers a range of almost any experiences - drama, music, visual arts etc. This study concerns written

This third stage is not unknown in the earlier stages, but is not characteristic of them. Likewise, for many users of historical critical method the hermeneutic task awaits the third stage, two worlds together; the "fusing of horizons" for Gadamer; "second naivete" for Ricoeur; the other side of criticism, the hermeneutics of retrieval that follows the hermeneutics of suspicion; the movement from first order referential descriptive language to the second order language of poetics, of participation-in and belonging-to.

We turn to these two 20th century exponents of philosophical hermeneutics, and commentators on them

### **Suspicion and Retrieval**

Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic circle of suspicion and retrieval offers a rich and helpful model: We seek explanation in suspicion - a critical activity to destroy the idols we project onto the sacred Word; an unmasking of human wish-fulfillments; a reductive explanation.

We seek understanding in retrieval - using the power of symbols, metaphor and narrative to restore the power of language for creative and productive purposes; a creative function; a constructive (post-critical) retrieval of meaning and power.

Suspicion takes us behind the text. Retrieval allows us into the issue of the text.

This double function of hermeneutics is central. For Ricoeur, the hermeneutic task is far larger than explaining the text, although this critical task is always necessary. It is a quest for understanding new modes of being, possible worlds in the text, worlds which have the capacity to transform us.

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texts, specifically the Bible.

“Hermeneutics seems to me to be animated by this double motivation: *willingness to suspect, willingness to listen; vow of rigour, vow of obedience*. In our time we have not finished doing away with *idols* and we have barely begun to listen to *symbols*.”

We need iconoclasm, but we also need “... faith that has undergone criticism, *postcritical* faith ... It is a rational faith for it interprets; but it is a faith because it seeks, through interpretation, a second naivete ... ‘believe in order to understand, understand in order to believe’ ... Its maxim is the ‘hermeneutical circle’ itself of believing and understanding.”<sup>30</sup>

Criticism operates in order to arrive at post-critical creativity “on the yonder side of the critical desert.”<sup>31</sup>

### **Originary Expressions of Revelation**

In his discussion of retrieval, Ricoeur helps us first with his discussion of the originary expressions of revelation.<sup>32</sup> He takes us beyond the genre differentiation of literary criticism to understand the nature of these expressions of revelation.

Three levels of language have been unhelpfully amalgamated in one form of traditional teaching about revelation. This has brought together:

- a. the level of confession of faith;
- b. the level of ecclesial dogma;
- c. the body of doctrines imposed by the magisterium as the rule of orthodoxy.

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<sup>30</sup> cited in Thistleton p 347 & 348 from Freud and Philosophy: *An Essay on Interpretation*, Eng. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970, pp27 & 28

<sup>31</sup> Thistleton, p 372

<sup>32</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, "Towards a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation", pp. 73-95.

This amalgamation is both opaque and authoritarian. Ricoeur sees b. and c. as derived and subordinate in character, and seeks a return to a., "the most originary level" of discourse.

The principal benefit of such a return to the origin of theological discourse is that from the outset it places reflection before a variety of expressions of faith, all modulated by the variety of discourses within which the faith of Israel and then of the early church is inscribed. So instead of having to confront a monolithic concept of revelation, which is only obtained by transforming these different forms of discourse into propositions, we encounter a concept of revelation that is pluralistic, polysemic, and at most analogical in form...<sup>33</sup>

Ricoeur draws a number of implications that flow from this variety of originary expressions of revelation. Religious discourse should not begin with theological and philosophical assertions. Religious discourse should begin with the modalities of discourse that are most originary within the language of the community of faith. These forms of revelation are diverse, as seen in narrative, prophecy, legislation, wisdom and hymns, and the confession of faith is modulated by the form of discourse. Because of this diversity of form revelation is not uniform or monotonous, but polysemic and polyphonic. Rather than dictation the writer is moved by the force of what is said. The God who reveals himself is always hidden in these modes of revelation. Revelation can never be a body of truths possessed by an institution, it comes in its own way.

This is more than mere genre recognition. It is a call to recognise that the confession of faith is made in different forms of discourse and modulated by that form. It is a call to look beyond the content of what is said in order to hear the form in which it is communicated.

## Poetics

To continue further in the retrieval task Ricoeur and Gadamer assist us by exploring the nature of language itself, in order to move beyond first order referential language that gives information about issues and things, to second order poetic language that restores to us "participation-in or belonging-to".

Gadamer seeks to address the problem that the "human sciences" have been forced into the same logic as the "natural sciences", that is inductive method and referential language.<sup>34</sup> Language is the medium of hermeneutic experience, and this has important consequences for hermeneutics.<sup>35</sup>

"That a historical text is made the object of interpretation means that it puts a question to the interpreter. Thus interpretation always involves a relation to the question that is asked of the interpreter."<sup>36</sup>

In coming to the text, the questioner becomes the one who is questioned. This introduces the speculative nature of language, language that poses a question

Speculative means the opposite of the dogmatism of everyday experience. A speculative person is someone who does not abandon himself directly to the tangibility of appearances or the fixed determinateness of the meant, but who is able to reflect or - to put it in Hegelian terms - who sees that the "in-itself" is a "for-me".<sup>37</sup>

Language itself, however, has something speculative about it in a quite different sense - not only the sense Hegel intends, as an instinctive prefiguring of logical reflection - but, rather, as the realisation of meaning, as the event of speech, of mediation, of coming to an understanding. ...

Even in the most every day speech there appears an element of speculative reflection, namely the intangibility of that which is still the purest reproduction of meaning. ...

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 75

<sup>34</sup> H.G. Gadamer, *Truth and method*.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 461 ff.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 369, 370.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 466.

All this is epitomised in the poetic word. ...

... everything that constitutes everyday speech can recur in the poetic word. If poetry shows people in conversation, then what is given in the poetic statement is not the statement that the written report would contain, but in a mysterious way the whole of the conversation is as if present.

... the work itself, as poetic word, is.<sup>38</sup>

The speculative nature of language, in contrast to dogmatic and referential language, takes us beyond a subject-object relationship to the text.

Ricoeur makes this point also.

My deepest conviction is that poetic language alone restores to us that participation-in or belonging-to an order of things which precedes our capacity to oppose ourselves to things taken as objects opposed to a subject. Hence the function of poetic discourse is to bring about this emergence of a depth-structure of belonging-to amid the ruins of descriptive discourse.<sup>39</sup>

Poetics includes the totality of literary genres inasmuch as they exercise a referential function that differs from a descriptive referential function of ordinary language. This referential function suspends the descriptive, it does not directly augment our knowledge of objects, but is a form of knowing that is more originary than the descriptive. "Here truth no longer means verification but manifestation, ie., letting what shows itself be."<sup>40</sup>

If revelation through event and word (relational) is a primary level of revelation, then poetics (as language) allows manifestation of that primary event and is a secondary level of revelation. Poetics brings us into the being of the issue of the text, which is manifested to us by the text.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp. 469, 470.

<sup>39</sup> Ricoeur, *Essays*, p. 101.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

Gadamer adds to this idea throughout *Truth and Method* in his use of two separate words for "experience". *Erlebnis* is something that you have. It is connected with a subject, and negatively for Gadamer, with the subjectivization of aesthetics.

In contrast, *Erfahrung* is something you undergo. You are drawn into an "event" of meaning. Subjectivity is overcome as you are drawn into this event. *Erfahrung* is the experience of relating to other persons and to our cultural past in dialogue, especially the dialogue of question and answer.

This is an on-going integrative process in which what we encounter widens our horizon by overturning our existing perspective. In this we "know" not simply by adding to our stock of information, but by gaining broad perspective of a range of human life and culture, and at the same time remaining aware of our own limits and finitude, remaining non-dogmatic about our knowing. Beauty and truth are experienced in this dialogue of question and answer, not owned as a possession.

*Erlebnis* allows for a plural, "experiences". *Erfahrung* is integrative and hence singular. Gadamer encourages us to transcend the limitations of the aesthetic dimension of *Erlebnis* type experience. *Erfahrung* raises "... the question of truth ... in a new way."<sup>41</sup>

Poetics implicit within narrative is developed very helpfully by Kermode, Sternberg and others.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p100.

<sup>42</sup> Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: on the interpretation of narrative*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1979.

Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*, Indiana University Press, 1975.

Narrative acquires a life of its own:

"... texts upon which a higher value has been placed become especially susceptible to the transformations wrought by those who seek spiritual senses behind the kernel ..." <sup>43</sup>

Narrative develops this life of its own in many ways:

through deafness and forgetfulness (of text, history and interpreter);

interpretative zeal becomes subject to regulation by the institution;

plot becomes character, and character then takes over the narrative; <sup>44</sup>

and thus language addresses us at a deeper level than the merely descriptive. The quest for precise facts in narrative is doomed to disappointment as the narrative draws us to participate in the issue of the text.

### **The Fusing of Horizons**

Gadamer's expression of the horizon of the text and the horizon of the interpreter, and the coming together of these two worlds, is a further helpful statement of the hermeneutic task.

He seeks to steer away from both the subjectivity of romanticism and the objectivity of historicism. In any situation there is a horizon -

"... the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. ... working out the hermeneutical situation means acquiring the right horizon of inquiry for the questions evoked by the encounter with tradition." <sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Kermode, *Genesis*, p. 20.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 302

We must place ourselves in the other situation in order to understand it.<sup>46</sup>  
The issue of the text requires us to overcome our distance from it, we must meet it on its terms.

At the same time we must recognise who we are and where we are coming from.

We must have our own horizon in order to be able to transpose ourselves into a situation.<sup>47</sup>

Transposing ourselves consists neither in the empathy of one individual for another, nor in subordinating another person to our own standard; rather, it always involves rising to a higher universality that overcomes not only our own particularity but also that of the other.<sup>48</sup>

The hermeneutical situation is determined by the prejudices that we bring with us, they constitute the horizon of a particular present, but are continually being tested in encountering the past tradition, emphasised by Gadamer within his text in italics as follows:

*... understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves.*<sup>49</sup>

Whenever we encounter a text there is a tension between its situation and our situation. It is our task to bring this out, not cover it up. Understanding is not binary (a person understands something), rather it is a three-way relation: one person comes to an understanding with another about something they thus both understand. Understanding is the fusion of horizons, the horizon of the text which comes as a question to the horizon of the interpreter. In this dialogue the interpreter becomes witness to the issue mediated

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 303.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 305.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 305.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 306.

by the text. Like the couple in love, two worlds can come together without the loss of either.

### **Hermeneutics and Ministry Practice**

Clearly the hermeneutic question, of one coming to an understanding with another about something they both understand, underlies all aspects of ministry. This is the substance of all relationships, including our relationship with scripture. Gadamer, Ricoeur and others have been responding to the same questions that I have been grappling with in ministry. In their writings I discover theoretical underpinning for intuitive and practical insights developed on the job:

- my/our sense of the power and importance of the text in forming and sustaining us. The “Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments” attract us in powerful and profound ways. This seems to be ingested ‘with mother’s milk’ for those brought up in a climate of faith, and stories are legion of people profoundly affected by the simple witness of the words of scripture, whatever their faith background - St Augustine and the invitation to “take up and read” springs readily to mind. I intuitively gained this ‘for-me’ sense of scripture from earliest days. The scriptures are an invitation to us and a question of us, both at the same time.
- the need for critical study. My early dissatisfaction with the promise box expressed my need for critical appraisal of scripture. I can enter the world of the text far more effectively when I recognise that my world is different. The desirable end of the ‘fusing of horizons’ is greatly helped by

recognising and differentiating horizons, and while the illusion of total objectivity has long since evaporated the critical tools available remain important and in some uses essential. Critical study is a liberating experience for me, helping me to stand back from my own horizon, enough at least to recognise the world of scripture as another, different horizon.

- the corresponding and contrasting need to enter the life of the text. On its own critical study can become sterile, leaving us longing for the refreshment and transformation that we sense the world of scripture offers. The single most helpful contribution of Ricoeur and Gadamer is the way they spell out this retrieval task, each in their own way. The scriptures are an invitation to a confession of faith, a language event that requires our living participation and belonging-to.
- the use of the lectionary, and allowing the text to ‘come towards me’. This usage has allowed scripture to exhibit a life of its own, and has helped me to hear the questions that the scriptures ask of my own existence. Used this way the text come more strongly as a *prior* question to my questions of existence or the questions of the congregation. In this way the priority of “the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments” emerges in preaching. Twentieth century hermeneutics help me name and understand this intuitive insight.

- allowing the same movement of the text towards me in devotional use. For the same reasons as those for using the lectionary I can relax in devotional reading of scripture, confident in the power of scripture to speak for itself, responding to its powerful otherness. There is now a place for the randomly selected promise of early family devotional life.

- the styles with which the scriptures speak:

as manifestation of primary revelation, confession of faith by people recognising God acting in their history;

recognising the diverse voices in which this confession of faith is expressed;

recognising the nature of the language used - poetics - bringing into being the issue of the text, allowing us to experience scripture, allowing 'participation-in'.

and these foundations support the entire pastoral task - preaching, education, mission, church discipline, and even administration. These things I have worked through in my own experience. Theoretical foundations spelled out by Ricoeur and Gadamer help me to own these insights more confidently, and to recognise the same insights originating from other starting points, for example in the pastoral style of Henri Nouwen and the practice of ministry concerns of Denham Grierson. I hear these issues in ministry and the use of scripture echoed by Salvation Army officers across the world.

Grierson approaches the ministry task with a question: Where are the openings for ministry? "... if you are travelling towards a brick wall at great speed on a motor cycle with the intention of passing beyond the wall, it is helpful to know where the openings exist that will enable you to pass through the wall without harm."<sup>50</sup> Listen to the culture of the local church, the places and people and words, hidden and obvious. In his own way Grierson is inviting us to do as Gadamer suggests, one coming to an understanding with another about something they both understand, the fusing of two horizons. This is not forceful or coercive, dogmatic or authoritarian, but gracious and invitational.

Practised in this way, ministry is applied hermeneutics, and hermeneutical style shapes the form and outcome of ministry.

Henri Nouwen in his classic *Reaching Out* sounds the same tone in describing pastoral ministry as a movement from hostility to hospitality.

Hospitality, therefore, means primarily the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place<sup>51</sup>

Our most important question as healers is not 'What to say or to do?' but, 'How to develop enough inner space where the story can be received?'<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Grierson, p39

<sup>51</sup> Nouwen, H.J.M., *Reaching Out*, Fount, 1975, pp 68-69.

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*, p 90.

Again, the practice of ministry is applied hermeneutics. In preaching, teaching, counselling and administering, our understanding of what is happening, as meaning is transferred between people, or between a text and a person, profoundly shapes the content and outcome of the exchange. Our hermeneutical style shapes and gives substance to the ministry outcomes. In the words of Marshall McLuhan, “the medium is the message”.

## **PART B**

*Using Scripture in (my) Ministry*

## **Chapter Four**

### **The January Bible School (1):**

#### *Semi-structured Group Discussion*

We moved to Ingle Farm Corps in 1993 and discovered that 10-12 years earlier a serious beginning had been made in addressing adult biblical literacy in a Bible School presented by one of the Corps Officers, Barbara Wilson. This was replaced after several years by the Bethel Bible Study series following the arrival of Brian Mundy as Corps Officer. Well over 100 people completed various forms of this programme, some with a two year commitment. With Brian's departure the Bethel programme wound down over five years as some new intakes began and various courses were completed. Bethel had been a huge encouragement to bible study, but its usefulness for the time, as largely an overview programme (and, I judge, operating often within a fairly tight doctrinal framework), was at an end.

Home Fellowship Groups were organised, in part as a replacement, but also with specific pastoral care objectives. About 80-90 people continue to attend these groups. However, while the fellowship and pastoral care objectives are significantly met, the systematic bible study and literacy needs were met only in a patchy and largely unsatisfactory way.

The need for improved bible study opportunities was raised in many ways, and specifically at a Soldiers, Adherents and Friends Meeting in mid 1993, a meeting for assessing our life as a Corps and for setting specific goals. Towards the end of 1993 planning was completed for four series of Bible Schools to run through 1994, each of four weeks duration, two series conducted by myself and two staffed by faculty from the Bible College of South Australia. Our planning attempted not to interfere with the existing Home Fellowship Groups by placing the first Bible School series in January and the others in the last two weeks of school term plus the two weeks of school holidays, with a scheduled break at these times for the Home Fellowship Groups.

The aim of the bible school was to provide a learning opportunity for adults that raised issues of biblical scholarship in a way that nurtured spiritual application.

Method of presentation was lecture with smaller cluster interaction for participants.

In the January Bible School certain convictions about the learning capacity of the people attending, about educational method, and about hermeneutics were emphasised and displayed as follows:

**CONVICTIONS: EDUCATIONAL**

That adults can and wish to learn, and that the adult learner must be engaged as a partner in the learning process. The adult brings both life experience and a capacity for self-direction that can either be key resources or fatal blockages to learning.

**CONVICTIONS: ABOUT SCRIPTURE AND ITS MEANING**

That adult Christians can profit by taking seriously the human and historical dimensions of the Bible. That the “black marks on a white page” can come with transforming effect into the life of the reader.

**CONVICTIONS: LOCAL**

That Mark’s picture of Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified Son of God, and his call to discipleship can be heard by this group of people; that the excitement of Mark’s method and message can be caught for transforming effect.

These convictions are a benchmark to assist in measuring the outcomes in the participants. Displaying them raised awareness and assisted the learning.

A course outline appears as Appendix 2. Included is the feedback questionnaire circulated at the end of the series.

More than 70 different people attended either the Tuesday morning or Wednesday evening through this January holiday period; about 50 attended at least three of the four sessions. This attendance was double that which I anticipated. I am aware of only two who ceased attending because they were not enjoying the school, both of whom were teenagers.

A feedback sheet was useful to gain reactions to details of setting and style and content, although this method does not encourage considered and thoughtful response. However this feedback and the subsequent interviews support one another - they suggest that the interviews are generally representative of those who attended. Special insights recalled include:

considerable reference to Mark's structure and literary method as it discloses meaning, the specific issue of divorce, the centrality of the cross, the theme of grace (especially in the call to discipleship).

The fifty people who attended at least three sessions were all invited to a semi-structured group discussion to:

- assess the value and effectiveness of the Bible School
- contribute to a course of study that I am doing

Eight people attended and involved themselves in a discussion loosely structured around these questions:

1. What is one thing you remember most clearly about the Bible School?
2. What lasting impression remains from the Bible School?
3. Did the Bible School affect the way you see yourself as a Christian? and if so, how?
4. How important is Scripture in Christian life?
5. Did the Bible School help the linkage of Scripture and Christian life? and if so, how?

In conversation it emerged that only one of the volunteers had grown up within The Salvation Army, and that Presbyterian, Methodist, Uniting Church, Baptist and Churches of Christ backgrounds were represented. Long-term Salvationists were evenly represented at the Bible School as a percentage of our congregation, but not in this discussion. This however need not skew the responses for the purposes of this project - they are all currently part of a Salvation Army congregation and were participants in the Bible School.

### **Relevant Issues Raised in Discussion**<sup>53</sup>

**Question: What is one thing you remember most clearly about the Bible School?**

**Presentation**, page 2, described as interesting and clear by Tom, and supported strongly by Jenny and Shirley. Mabel found the first session too heavy, **too theological**, page 2, and represented two or three others in that opinion, but attended all sessions and found them helpful (c/f. Janice also, p 10).

Tom extended his use of the word **presentation** on page 4 by recognising in it *a climate of permission* (my words) to hold differing opinions, and that this allowed him to remain more open to the text.

Russell developed *climate of permission*, page 5, as permission to **use my brain** ie. to *think*, that the scriptures are open to critical scrutiny. **Thinking** and **faith go hand in hand**. Thought is not the enemy of faith, but its companion.

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<sup>53</sup> Page numbers refer to Appendix 3, the transcript of this discussion. The text cited is in bold face here and also in the transcript, italic bold if it is my interpretation of the intention of the transcript.

Rob took this further with reference to his background in study from both ends of the theological spectrum, **fundamentalist** and **liberal**, page 5. His comment highlights the need for suspicion and retrieval in hermeneutics; these issues are felt after and expressed at the grass roots level. The fundamentalist position is difficult to sustain, but the critical processes can be barren for transforming effect.

A specific image found helpful by many in understanding literary structure was raised by Rob - the **Markan sandwich**, page 6. This 'visualisation' of structure is easily illustrated from the text and enormously instructive for understanding. This application of *method* was readily accepted and valued and applied to the meaning of the text. **It gave Mark a reason to exist for me (*alongside other gospels*)**, was Russell's extension of this thought, echoed by many others, page 6.

For Evan this approach to literary structure gave an interpretive key **putting into context the healings of (*by*) Jesus**, page 7, avoiding what he considers to be excess of zeal in some interpretations. He emphasised the importance of **historical background** for analysis, with the corresponding conclusion that the scriptures can **stand our scrutiny** page 7. Russell added the need to understand *our own historical context*, page 8.

Shirley then commented that she recognised the approach that we were taking cutting across **a denominational sort of touch**, page 8, by taking a text within its own context rather than proof texting for doctrinal purposes and ignoring passages that do not suit our doctrinal purposes. This introduces the idea of *canon within canon*.

Mabel applied this insight to her early Scottish Presbyterian experience **-all hell fire and brimstone** with little attention to gospel narrative, page 8. This strongly shaped

her understanding of the nature of God, and a new understanding seems to be emerging from a new method and openness to the text - **you showing us how it wasn't just the actual words that were spoken, it was the meaning behind them.**

All agreed with my paraphrasing of Evan, that our approach **presented a few challenges**, page 9. Janice recognised that the most difficult session was the first one. This is to be expected when so much material and method is new.

**Question: What impressions remain from the Bible School?**

**For evangelism**, page 13. **To me it gives credibility (*to my faith*), it gives me something to talk with people about.** Faith and understanding are important for sharing faith. This is a point important to me before entering professional ministry (chapter 1). It is important to allow others to think. For Russell our method was important to take us to the issue of the text - **by tackling it the way we tackled just opens up a whole lot - makes it alive rather than dead and gone and old**, and that was affirmed by the experience of others, page 15.

Shirley and Mabel moved out of Russell's comment, (despite my inappropriate question to change the direction,) to introduce the importance and power of narrative, in this case narrative treatment of the Passion and Easter, and a narrative version of John's gospel, in Mabel's case moving her to tears for the first time while using scripture, page 15.

I tried again with my question on what gives scripture its authority. For Rob it is the Spirit working in the believer to bring it to life. For Tom too it is a liveliness, echoed in other means of grace - preaching and hymns.

Russell raised the need for some sort of control in interpretation, page 18, and his sense of confidence in our approach - **I had a lot of confidence because I had been under your teaching before, that you are careful in the tools that you brought to the understanding of scripture**, and this was supported by Jenny, who felt she could **become part of the disciples with the things that go on in your life. You made us become part of it ....** , page 18. This was very encouraging comment. The three sets of convictions articulated at the beginning were being verified.

Raising **divorce**, page 20, as a specific life issue was widely appreciated in applying scripture to pastoral need. At the time of presentation I sensed rapt attention, and a number of comments were made to me personally and in the feedback sheet. It was exciting for people to recognise a word of grace from the text on this issue - **divorce happens ... not ideal ... *people can be forgiven* ... let's move on from here. ... You can leave that behind**, page 21. **Jesus was a people person**. Scripture is not a weapon to oppress people but a means of liberation. This application to this pastoral situation, widely experienced by the participants, was both risky and highly rewarding. Scripture was working to shape self-understanding as a christian.

**Question: How important is scripture in Christian life?**

**primary (Evan) ... essential (Rob) ... but in most cases scripture comes alive when I hear it and when I read it and it works in parables, in events that I've known in everyday life ... (Tom), page 22, emphasising the importance of participating in scripture.**

**I tend to agree (*but*) I'm also thinking 'How do I know what scripture is?'** (Russell), page 23, and the context of this comment is that we see scripture from within our own horizon - friends, family, worshipping community, local culture. He continues **Which means that the bible is not my God. God's sort of mystery up there ... he's impacted on people in the past and their expression and their experience is what I can now share, and God helps me share that. My own community here has experienced (*God*) and when it is consistent with God's revelation in the past it's valid. And I build on that - it's a living thing.**, page 24.

This comment expresses well the way scripture sits within a living tradition.

**Question: Did the Bible School help the linkage of scripture and christian life? and if so how?**

Rob responded, **I relate to the disciples, who had a heap of imperfections - able to think, well, there's hope for me yet,** page 25. This patience with our own struggle is much sought after in my pastoral experience.

Mabel felt she had something to offer to other people, and was joined by Janice ***you don't realise what you've actually learnt,*** page 26, with the sense that it emerges when needed.

These are significant learnings in the lives of the participants. This semi-structured discussion indicates that the Bible School has been helpful at depth, affecting belief, attitude and action. The hermeneutical method, even where it is not really understood by the participant or possibly at odds with that person's own method, applied in a situation of trust, has proved effective. The convictions declared at the beginning have been verified.

## Chapter Five

### **The January Bible School (2):**

#### *In-depth interviews*

In-depth interview was chosen as a method to further reflection on using scripture within my ministry. Where the group discussion was useful to test a self-selected representative sample of participants in the Bible School, in-depth interview offers an opportunity to explore in detail how scripture works in the lives of selected people who responded with obvious enthusiasm to the learning opportunity.

The first person chosen was Russell Pace, a deliberate choice in view of our teaching/learning association over a twelve year period. He was a Cadet at The Salvation Army Training College in my time on the teaching staff and is a member of my previous congregation. Ken and Pam Thompson are representative of people coming/returning to the church in recent times. I chose to interview Ken and Pam together, as a husband and wife couple, and in this way make opportunity for each to help the other in their responses. Jenny Hein has been part of this Corps all her life. With Russell and Jenny I felt a confidence that they were largely in tune with the method and content of the Bible School - each were tertiary graduates and this contributed to their readiness. Pam and Ken had expressed their own appreciation of the Bible School directly to me. I probably needed the confidence that this selection of 'sympathetic' people engendered. Ingle Farm Corps has a substantial fundamentalist stream within it, something I have been aware of from the beginning,

and something I consciously worked with in the Bible School. The selection of sympathetic interviewees was, however, not deliberate at the time.

The transcripts of the first interview with each of these appear as Appendix 4a, 4b and 4c respectively.<sup>54 55</sup> “The uses of scripture in your life” was the underlying topic in all three interviews.

### **Issues Emerging for Russell:**

Russell recalled Sunday School teaching and **memorising bible verses**, page 1, from a young age, *associated with a basic belief in God and Jesus*, page 1. However his first memory of faith that was **alive** comes from teenage years, in reading the Living Bible version of the New Testament. In this awakening of christian experience he recognised **scripture feeding an experience and the experience feeding scripture**, page 2. The Living Bible paraphrase was easy to read. Even the *style and presentation* of the ‘*Jesus Way*’ youth edition was important in this new interest, page 2.

His reading was ‘uncritical’ in style, without the ability to discern historical and critical issues. The style was **meeting the needs of the time with the scriptures**, page 2.

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<sup>54</sup> Italic print in Appendix 4a are subsequent written comments by Russell, who accepted the opportunity for further response. Bold face type is quotation from the appendix, with page number given. Text thus used is also highlighted in bold face within the transcript.

<sup>55</sup> Note: The interview process remained somewhat restrained - more so than a casual conversation. This was due in part to the presence of the tape recorder. I think the restraint was more within the person I interviewed than within myself, although I had to restrain myself from taking too much part in the conversation and discipline myself to more careful listening.

There was some support from activities within the local Corps, but *in general the whole experience of an active Christian community at University* (in the Evangelical Union) *did more for my faith than the more predictable/traditional Salvation Army*, page 3.

As a graduate *I had to develop a philosophical approach to life that was a meld of University study and University Christian experiences. Standard Army 'evangelical' church teaching was too narrow, eg creation and science*, page 3. Later theological studies enhanced this.

**I went through a third stage when I did my Dip Th studies**, page 4. This was a move beyond the valuable but naive reading of teenage years. It was *exhilarating*, page 5, to be able to reconcile scripture/teaching with *"real life"*, page 5. It was important for Russell to do some of this as extra study, with a greater sense of self-direction and freedom to think. He speaks of his enjoyment in discovering the Old Testament - **before ... just like reading a legal document, whereas after the work we did it became more like a living document ... It was the story of people's experiences of God. Bible was less closed and prescriptive. It became more open and perceptive**, page 6. Many of the convictions about adult learning (Chapter four) are validated here.

Any reference to his own time in professional ministry emerged in talking about preaching. The context was with regard to on-going use of scripture and spiritual growth. Russell much prefers a teaching setting, and makes a plea for more opportunities for this within The Salvation Army.

**Issues emerging for Ken and Pam:**

Spiritual interest quickened for Ken at a time of health crisis. **I suddenly had a feeling that I needed something more ... it was my spiritual life that was short,** page 1. The Salvation Army was the predominant experience of his boyhood, and Ingle Farm Corps became his church. It was **the life, the brightness ... the fellowship ... plus the activities** that helped him settle, page 2.

Pam describes herself as being broad in religious interests. She was pleased to attend with Ken - **I felt comfortable. Fellowship ... seemed to go deeper,** page 3.

For Ken the Bible School was a transforming experience. **I always considered myself a Christian, and that I knew it all. That was my first real eye opener I think - to have the book of Mark explained and discussed,** page 3. By his report this had remarkable impact in his life. **I have changed as far as my attitude to other people - I would say “I can take them or leave them”, but I find that that is not the right attitude; you’ve got to take them! not leave them!,** page 4. This interaction of scripture and faith with life is remarkable for its speed and depth and intensity.

When asked what it was in content or style that was so helpful Ken responded: **I can’t identify anything in particular, but just the fact that if we asked a question we got an answer, and a practical answer you might say, and someone else’s point of view,** page 4. He is not asking for much! ‘A sense of openness to the text’ comes through time and time again as an essential attitude that is liberating and empowering. Yet Ken is not recognising any hermeneutical method. He is simply enjoying the outcomes.

Pam, who is a keen reader, found it helpful to gain an overall perspective of Mark's Gospel. The first night was challenging, but review of the material at home with Ken helped greatly to understand and bring Mark's message close to home. ... **it ... helps you cope with the stress of our present times**, page 5. Ken also emphasised to helpfulness of quiet reflection after the sessions.

Pam emphasised that she could not **go along with a dogmatic (approach)**, page 5. I sense she is sincere in this, and with Ken is able to express this as needing room to **enquire**, page 5. This is the beginning of a creative and open hermeneutic, but the balance of the interviews show that it is just a beginning, significantly influenced I suspect by who was asking the questions.

Soon after the Bible School Ken entered hospital for further surgery on a brain tumour. **I went back for my second bout of surgery very confident ... that I had someone with me all the time, no matter what happened**, page 6.

**I feel that I can talk to other people about a christian life now**, page 6, was a further issue introduced by Ken. He felt free to offer answers where he could and free not to have answers where he knew none, preferring rather to refer to others.

Ken and Pam are both very 'down to earth' people, not inclined to try to create a good impression. The sense of spiritual growth, particularly in Ken, is breathtaking. Many things have contributed to this, and the Bible School is notable among these.

Perhaps I chose better than I knew in interviewing Ken and Pam. The Bible School clearly worked for them, but not necessarily because they understood or appreciated my hermeneutical motivations. It emerges more clearly in the second interview with these people that while they appreciate and respond to the **fruit** of hermeneutic method, they are not yet grasped by that which grasps me. This is an example of working effectively with people who are within a more dogmatic framework, but working out of my own hermeneutical convictions, leaving room for them to be where they are while opening the possibility of moving beyond that point. Success in this is always an expression of grace, and in Ken and Pam's case there is real reason for gratitude! They were certainly not antagonistic to my objectives in the Bible School. Their natural inclination is to explore issues for themselves. I suspect that in matters of faith their education had been more directive and dogmatic. I set out to give participants the tools to discover their own truths, them learning rather than me sermonising. It is too early to expect them to consciously use these tools.

**Issues emerging for Jenny:**

Jenny's learning from scripture has emerged gradually against a background of 'always knowing it's there'. She senses that devotional reading of scripture is **the one area of my Christian life that I tend to fall down on**, page 2. She feels this should be an important **time of communion with God**, page 2, rather than simply turning to God in time of trouble. (Since the interview she reports taking steps to make this activity effective.)

Systematic study of scripture is also important to Jenny. Two years with the Bethel programme were **the two best years of my life**, page 3. She was delighted to put her mind to Mark's Gospel in the Bible School. It helps her to have such stimulus to study. She believes that the bible both requires and can stand our critical scrutiny. Biblical truth is not necessarily **word-for-word literal truth**, page 4. **Overall it is God speaking to his people through other people, and that is why we need to put it in the context of its' time**, page 5.

The bible provides principles for resolving the questions of our day.

The Bible School recalled and reinforced various 'aha' experiences: Markan sandwiches was cited, page 5. One new insight came in our treatment of the ending of the gospel at chapter 16 verse 8, a theological ending that recasts the meaning of what has preceded it, page 6.

Jenny understood the scriptures as a key resource for her spiritual life. **If we didn't have the bible, I would find it very difficult to be a christian**, page 6. However, as Salvationists, we are often too busy to treat them as seriously as we would like. In the healthy numbers that respond to opportunities for bible study she recognises a hunger for study and the need for programmed activity of this sort.

With regard to the Bible School, Jenny would have liked the smaller table group discussions to be tighter, under the direction of a leader appointed at the time,

although she volunteered that her mother, in the same group, enjoyed them as they were and wanted more.

She commended the lecture style that incorporated questions and dialogue from the floor.

Jenny's responses are more subdued than Ken and Pam's, and are closer to Russell's. In part this reflects their contrasting life experience and church attendance. Did I select Jenny and Russell with the expectation that their spiritual pilgrimage would parallel my own? This is certainly the group of people I most easily direct my ministry towards.

**Learnings from the Bible School:**

The convictions that I carried into the Bible School regarding adult learning, hermeneutical possibilities and the local congregation were justified beyond my expectations and hopes.

Usually in a teaching role feedback is limited to a few casual yet sincere comments. The Feedback Sheet gave fuller indication of outcomes in people's lives. However it required the semi-structured group discussions and the interviews to reveal the quality of those outcomes, and this they did to a surprising extent.

The group discussion affirmed the importance of an open style of presentation, non-dogmatic, that allows possibilities to emerge from the text. Implied in the ‘convictions’ undergirding the Bible School is the sense that “faith seeking understanding” is both legitimate and fruitful, that careful thought and lively faith are good and constructive companions.

Conscious use of method assisted greatly in drawing out meaning from the text. This included overt use of historical background, literary, form, redaction and narrative critical tools, introduced gently through examples from the text. This was hard work and a challenge for the participants. They responded enthusiastically, in homework, in continued attendance, in lively discussion and debate over supper/morning tea. A sense of confidence between teacher and learners was crucial in this process. I was glad to have one year with this congregation before undertaking the Bible School. The mutual trust allowed rapid and substantial progress.

In-depth interviews revealed that for Russell and Jenny the Bible School was a welcome continuation and development of the scriptures shaping and sustaining their spiritual journey. They recognise the scriptures as crucial in their identity and growth as christians and would basically share the convictions that I carried into the Bible School.

I was pleased that I had the opportunity to interview Ken and Pam. Ken blossomed within a climate of permission to explore the scriptures. The black marks certainly emerged from the white page with transforming effect. This rapidly germinated with practical outcomes: attitudes towards others, and conversation with others about

christian substance. This first interview with Ken and Pam left me with a certain unease, more clearly identified after the second series of interviews as the possibility that they responded more to trust and positive estimation of me personally rather than a liberating hermeneutical style.

Implied in the discussion and the interviews is the sense that the scriptures cannot be separated from the many other means of grace at work in a congregation, such as music, testimony, prayer and also the trusted preacher. Often, however, the direct use of scripture into the lives of people is minimal.

My familiarity and comfort with Mark's Gospel was important in these outcomes. I come to it with real passion, that the message is central for christian life, that a model for discipleship emerges in a relevant and practical way, and the way Mark's literary method points to his message.

Initial attendance numbers were surprising. Even more encouraging was the fact that the numbers maintained. Holidays and prior commitments took some away but they were replaced by others returning from the same activities. Two teenagers found it heavy going and decided not to continue. The Bible School deliberately targets a study of some substance.

The January Bible School had been a very satisfactory experience in its execution and outcomes. It is obviously a challenge to resource such an activity over a sustained

period. Ahead lay the task of matching the first Bible School and building on it with 1 Corinthians in July, a deadline approaching rapidly in the face of competing priorities.

## Chapter Six

### **The Nature of The Scriptures:**

#### *In-depth Interviews*

As it eventuated, the experience of the January Bible School and consequent discussion and interviews did not result in many changes to the June/July Bible School based on First Corinthians. There are a number of reasons:

- pressure of work - insufficient time to reflect on the transcripts and then prepare differently for the new Bible School. It takes time and space.
- the outcomes from January seemed very positive. Without the space and time for reflection as above, it was difficult to see what changes were needed.
- the content and context of the epistle to the Corinthians did not readily suggest an approach different from Mark's gospel. On reflection this is a bit surprising, and probably relates more to the fact that I studied them each in a similar way within my BD programme. More imagination is called for!

The first of these reasons was probably most important. Conscious of some difficulties with the table discussions first time around I actually reduced the discussion time in the second Bible School. This aspect of teaching method cries out for more attention. I suspect that I was subconsciously affected by the 'heaviness' of

the first session in January, and thus softened the introduction considerably for First Corinthians.

The impact has been far greater in planning Bible Schools for 1995. This was done by a group of people in a planning session chaired by me. At this time we agreed to integrate the Bible School and the Home Fellowship Groups during school terms. The Bible School presentation would lead into the discussion material of the subsequent weeks' Home Fellowship Group, and each operate on this fortnightly basis. Each activity can be attended independently. This should be an exciting and productive development.

In view of all the above, I adjusted the content of the second series of interviews with the four Bible School participants in order to explore more generally their understanding of the nature of the scriptures. This change addressed the overall objectives of the project - to consider ways in which the scriptures are incorporated into faith and practice within The Salvation Army - in a more focussed way, and also built more constructively on the earlier interviews so as to avoid repetition. I proposed five typical understandings of the nature and authority of the scriptures in advance to each person, and asked for a considered response in interview.<sup>56</sup>

The outline of the second Bible School is included for information as Appendix 5. Again good numbers of people responded with consistent attendance, and levels of

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<sup>56</sup> These five typical views were introduced by Gwen Ince at the first Residential School in 1989, extracted from D S Ferguson, *Biblical Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, SCM, 1987.

interest and interaction were encouraging throughout the sessions. I regret not issuing a further feedback sheet at the end of the series - this was an oversight.

The five views of scripture proved to be a helpful way for the respondents to discuss their understanding of the nature of scripture and their developing hermeneutic. Again we will work through each person in turn and then develop insights that emerge.

Each received the following request:

I have been pleased to interview you a few months ago on the place of Scripture in your life.

To complete the exercise, I would like to catch up with you again - this time for less than half an hour.

In preparation for this, I share five typical views of the nature of the Bible. Could you please give some thought to these, and be ready to share which most closely represents your understanding and why. If none of them makes sense, that's OK too!

I'll be in touch to arrange a time to catch up.

1. The Bible itself is part of God's self-revelation. The Bible is the inspired Word of God. The Word of God is the Bible. The Bible is the rule of faith and practice for Christians. It is free from error. Whatever it says, God says.
2. The Bible is witness to and testimony of God's self-revelation, recorded out of human experience and observation. The Word of God is the gracious activity of God throughout history. Because the Bible is the record of this history, God speaks through it, and it can in this sense be regarded as the Word of God. It is concerned with salvation, and should not be used in deciding questions of natural science, prehistory, etc. ...
3. Jesus Christ is the living Word of God, living revelation of the divine being. As witness to Jesus Christ, the Bible provides access to the Word of God, but is not itself the Word.
4. The Bible becomes the Word of God, and may be said to be inspired, as it is faithfully proclaimed in the church and accepted by faith.
5. The Bible is inspired only insofar as all literature is inspired, and should be treated as any other book.

Another question in similar vein that might help clarify the above five views:  
From where does the Bible gain its authority?

### **Issues Emerging for Russell:**

Russell easily identified number two as his preferred option, wanting at the same time to include aspects of number four, page 2. His selection of number two is consistent with his earlier interview, where he made impressively clear statements of this position. **It makes the bible a living word to me**, page 2.

This understanding of ‘living word’ illustrates clearly the linkage between hermeneutic style and christian life. The way we read and understand scripture will shape what we receive from it. Russell articulates a need to allow scripture to address us in its own terms, and within our context. He explicitly rejects number one as rigid and deadening, **Number one doesn’t give me room to breathe. It doesn’t give scriptures room to breathe.**, page 3.

He also wants to emphasise the authority of scripture as it has expressed itself over the generations as effective mediation of God into the lives of people, by including number four. The bible is authoritative because it has worked and still works - **Scripture shapes our lives today, through the piece of paper with words on it and the role of the Holy Spirit, bringing it to live in a new context**, page 2. This recalls Gadamer’s ‘fusing of horizons’.

Russell recognises that all great literature could, by this standard, be **interpreted as Word of God**, but not have the **traditional authority of scripture for defining doctrine**, page 3. At the same time he explicitly rejects number five as reducing the bible to only the level of great literature. God has had a more directive role than that,

in the events in the people's lives and their writing about it, and in the canonisation of scripture.

Number three was not understood well by any of the respondents. For me it emphasises the idea that the scriptures are not to be equated with Jesus as Word of God - **if Jesus is unmediated Word of God, very God present among us, scripture is a step back from that, words mediating Word**, page 4. This view speaks against idolising scripture, a danger strongly present in number one. In the three interviews I led the respondents to some degree on this point in order to help them clarify this issue. With this assistance Russell seemed happier with position number three.

When asked to estimate the understanding of Salvationists in general, Russell thought that most **would tend to be closer to one than two, although in practice I think people probably tend to mull around one and two ... they would see the Word of God as the bible and as the rule of faith and free from error** (ie. number 1) - **those who haven't looked at it closely would say that**, page 4. Most would not have a problem with number two, but they would move out of number one. He proposes that this comes in large part from the wording of Salvation Army doctrines **favouring a literal interpretation of creation**, page 5. He is encouraging his own 10 year old daughter to a less literal view of the creation accounts to take her beyond (inadequate) Sunday School teaching, page 5.

He suggests that Salvation Army Officers take a pragmatic approach in using scripture, rather than a legalistic approach. **Salvationist clergy tend to be influenced**

**by the practical nature of the work of The Salvation Army, and even though they might believe one thing in their heart, when it comes down to implementing scripture in practice they tend to take the people approach rather than the legalistic approach,** page 7. In order to find an approach that works pastorally they move away from position number one. This is an interesting observation, and I sense a lot of truth in it. It suggests that hermeneutical convictions can be challenged and changed by pastoral realities. This accords with my experience and my observation of others.

Russell held to view number one from his earliest days, and into his twenties accepted the interpretations of his local community of faith. His Training College experience enabled him to make the necessary step away from an idolising of the bible. This, he believes, is necessary for maturing faith in Salvationists because our hermeneutic is basic to our understanding and the transforming impact of scripture in our lives.

**Issues Emerging for Ken and Pam:**

Compared with Russell and Jenny, both tertiary graduates, Ken and Pam were not used to discussing the abstract concepts contained within the five views of scripture that were presented. For this reason the interview did not flow well. On reflection I was also grappling with the issue discussed above in Chapter 5, that while Ken and Pam were enjoying the fruit of my hermeneutic method it was not for the same reasons that drive me. This says as much about me as it might about them.

Ken and Pam both wanted to incorporate aspects of each understanding of scripture, feeling that each also required further explanation, page 2. They were not easily able to distance themselves from any unsatisfactory aspects, except from number five, and also from the verbal dictation implied in number one, seeing rather that the scriptures communicate the intentions of God. **I very much doubt that it is free from error ... in general ... the meaning and the doctrines contained therein are fairly accurate,** page 2.

Each agreed strongly as I led them to the last part of number two. **“... should not be used for determining questions of natural science, prehistory, etc.”**, page 3, but their reasons seemed to be more to do with the limitations of science rather than the nature of the scriptures. **Science has been too contradictory, and hasn't really added anything to biblical explanation,** page 3, ... **The period of time of the bible is more in keeping with what we understand; science talks of time that we will never understand,** page 4. Yet they then strongly agreed that the purpose of the scriptures is to do with salvation, page 4. I sense that Ken and Pam were direct and honest in speaking their understandings, but were not able to put the pieces together consistently. This is understandable give the abstract nature of this discussion of scriptural authority.

They were not clear in understanding number three, page 4.

Their treatment of number four introduced an interesting twist. If the authority of scripture emerges in “faithful proclamation”, then the meaning will be strongly

controlled by the setting. They saw this as leading to the multiplicity of denominations and sects, and we end up with ‘denominational’ interpretation, page 4-5.

Their personal experience of the enduring power of scripture speaks against the fifth view of the nature of scripture. **I read a lot of novels and get enjoyment, but it doesn’t mean any more than a story. Whereas read the bible! ... The bible has an insidious way of creeping into your thoughts.** , page 5-6. The power and authority of scripture is seen in the way material memorised in Sunday School returns with impact well beyond that of other literature, page 6.

#### **Issues Emerging for Jenny:**

Jenny began with a clarification of the previous interview. For her the bible acts as an objective reference point for shaping faith, that ‘other horizon’ that beckons her and rings true, page 2. Her response calls to mind Gadamer’s two horizons - agreeing on an issue, that issue being God, humankind and salvation. Jenny, with her (subjective) horizon, recognises the horizon of scripture.

Jenny had difficulty disagreeing with any of the five views, finding them all lacking in some way, page 2. She felt most comfortable with number two, like Russell wanted to emphasise more **the link between the bible and God**, page 3, but unlike Russell (who incorporates number four) turned to **number one** to establish that link, page 3. **The interpretation is not removed from God. It is God using people and their**

**culture to make himself known to these people**, page 3. The bible is not just reflection on human experience, it is God speaking.

At the same time she says, **the bible is not literal truth, not word for word truth. The easiest example is, although I believe most firmly God created the world, I don't think he chose to do it in the way described in Genesis 1**, page 2.

View number three went too far for Jenny in removing God from the bible, but is helpful for avoiding bibliolatry, and thus **a stumbling block to actually experiencing God**, page 4.

**Number four** was useful for her, because if the bible is the Word of God we can expect it to come with transforming effect into the lives of people, page 4.

Jenny agrees that the bible is classic literature, but it is far more than that. **Classic literature might affect your thinking in some way, but it won't change your life**, page 5.

Jenny spoke for each of the interviewees that it is difficult, even impossible, to express their understanding of the nature and inspiration and authority of scripture in an unambiguous way. The nature of the scriptures resists this in the same way that the

nature of God resists our attempts to tie God down to our descriptions. However each was glad of the opportunity to consider the questions and found them helpful.

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It has been useful to put these propositions before these people. It was instructive to see how they worked for Russell and Jenny - I hear echoes of my own quests, and even more revealing of my own motivations to see these propositions work differently for Ken and Pam. While my delight is to work with those who face similar questions to my own, the hard part for me is to work creatively with people who operate with a more structured view of life.

The interviews encourage me to ask how I engage the dissenting voices. This is not to say that there is strong disagreement in the interviews, but in a case such as the Thomson's, while they appreciate and are helped by the **fruit** of hermeneutic method, it seems that they actually coming to this for a very different set of reasons. On its own this is not a problem, indeed it is most encouraging that the dialogue has been so fruitful. However the hermeneutic issue must be recognised. It has been focussed more sharply in the aggressively fundamentalist colleagues of Chapter 2.

To broaden the question, how do I interact with the more fundamentalist stream, not just in the use of scripture but in the whole practice of ministry?

For me the simplistic authoritative answers from scripture, answers that do not at the same time listen to the person being given them, are just not on. That is not the nature of the scriptures. However, many people want only this, and are understandably threatened by a more open style. With the diverse group at the Bible School trust was the essential ingredient that effectively nursed many through the experience and avoided a head-on hermeneutical clash.

As I look over my ministry I have tried to honour my own convictions and also understand, value and respect others who differ from me. I seek to respect an integrity in their position and mine, and good ministry requires that I do both. This has been most successful where mutual trust has been established. Others can value my input and be helped by it while not being 'forced' from their own view of the world.

This task is intensified when I follow a Corps Officer who has operated from a basically dogmatic and authoritarian outlook. In this situation some respond positively over a short period of time enjoying the space to ask questions. Others become puzzled after 6-18 months, wondering where I am coming from. In many cases this opens up a productive dialogue; in some cases further dialogue becomes very difficult.

I do sometimes show defensiveness however - it took some time to see what was happening for the Thomson's in their transcript.

In looking back I recognise that I am comfortable with my style and competencies, although I am keen to develop and do better. For example, it is time to explore further

some of the socio-critical models of hermeneutics, especially feminist approaches from a Salvation Army context.

The new challenge emerging from within this M. Min project seems to be the power/political and leadership issue of command that remains faithful to the gospel, leadership that releases rather than suppresses, within the Army structure. This is the mid-ministry question, as I face the possibility of other levels of command in our hierarchical structure.

As I reflect on the processes of this project, the interviews were always enjoyable at the time, for those interviewed and for myself. Transcription of these is tedious, and results at first seemed disappointing. Closer reading, however, confirmed that **the convictions held at the beginning of the Bible School were validated in the lives of participants.**

## **PART C**

### *The Uses of Scripture*

## Chapter Seven

### **Ministry and the Scriptures:**

#### *Drawing themes together in my context*

I recall the weekend of Easter 1989 and a summons to the Princess Margaret, the children's hospital in Perth. It was a summons. Theoretically I could have said "No. I'm too busy. It's not convenient." But for me it was part of "The Work".

The four year old boy was playing in his cot when an older friend crept into his room carrying a .22 calibre rifle. It was loaded and unsafe and it fell and discharged, the bullet ripping through the vulnerable four year old body. Blood pulsed out at frightening speed during the air ambulance trip to Perth.

Every day that weekend I visited, many times. The grandmother had Army links through the women's group, the Home League, at Bunbury. The boy's mother was between relationships, the father in jail. It was a deep privilege to enter the lives of those people, touching the deep places - the privilege of ministry.

Blood loss had been too severe and brain function was effectively dead. The decision was reached to turn off the respirator and the march of death continued. Doctor,

nursing staff, mother, grandmother and Salvation Army Officer; the whole team shared in quiet reverence the passing of young life, a cathode ray tube giving its muted testimony to what we knew was happening - the racing pulse diminishing to a straight line. The mother hugged her child, this dying body, in farewell.

In the background a radio, tuned well up the dial from my ABC preferences, played what was currently the boy's favourite song - a rugged rendition of earthy sentiment:

“I'm gonna take you to heaven,  
It'll make my day complete ...”

The team of care-givers turned to the clergyman for words, for prayer.

Ministry is the privileged role of mediating meaning in the deep places of life and death.

I readily agreed to the invitation to conduct the funeral - I was now part of the life of that family. The centre piece of this rite of farewell and grief and thanksgiving was the gravelly voice of Alice Cooper: “I'm gonna take you to heaven ...” It was mum's choice, and I was going to use it anyway! This became our text in a Christian funeral service, the means for mediating meaning and a sense of the presence of God in this tragic and senseless situation.

The practice of ministry *is* applied hermeneutics, “the fusing of two horizons supposedly existing by themselves”.<sup>57</sup> Ministry in its essence reduces to a network of relationships aimed at helping people to hear the Word of God, mediating meaning in the deep places of life and death.

The Word was actively present in the hospital ward, in the funeral, and in a popular song that on the surface spoke of a man returning home from work anticipating a passionate encounter with his partner. It was easy to decide to include the song in the funeral, but actually doing so did as much for me as for those I was seeking to help. Using the song demonstrated experientially the reality that God reveals as God chooses, and that good ministry expects and allows for this revelation to break into lives and situations. Particular means of grace, established rituals and patterns can serve the ministry tasks, but ministry occurs when the Word is mediated into lives and situations.

One of the means of grace is the Bible, “the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments”, honoured in The Salvation Army as revelation of God, both in doctrinal statement and deeply within the lives of its people. The scriptures are indeed the primary means of grace within The Salvation Army, deeply and genuinely at its core in implicit and explicit ways. By the grace of God the scriptures always have shaped and sustained The Salvation Army. The central place of the scriptures was expressed well back in 1929, at a pivotal time in Salvation Army history.<sup>58</sup> It is no less the case

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<sup>57</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, page 306

<sup>58</sup> Commissioner Alfred G. Cunningham published a series of articles in *The Staff Review*, a magazine circulated to officers internationally, under the title *‘THE BIBLE, Its Divine Revelation, inspiration and Authority*. I have

today. The words become Word, and the purpose of this project has been to investigate how this happens and how it might happen more effectively.

It is gratifying to recognise the many implicit ways that scripture functions effectively: singing and testimony, family life, the example of faithful forebears. Much of my ministry has been focussed on bringing scripture to the foreground, on making the use and understanding of scripture the prerogative and property of the ordinary Salvationist. It is crucial that they be equipped and accept the responsibility for handling the words; that they be empowered to encounter Word within words, without requiring a 'professional' mediator.

In 18 years of ministry I have endeavoured to be faithful to convictions that have grasped me regarding the use of scripture. This has affected all areas of ministry as I experience them. To some extent I have arrived at a ministry destination, a point where I am relaxed and comfortable with who I am with the scriptures within The Salvation Army. This has involved a journey from espoused theory to integrated practical ministry. With the benefit of hindsight I can see that confirmation of this destination has been my chief motivation for embarking on M.Min studies. At the same time there is much that lies ahead in developing both my hermeneutic and my ability to communicate in lively and creative ways. An example is the need to apply

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only come to these articles, republished in 1961, in recent years. They are remarkable for their clear statement of the bible as a means of grace rather than a dogmatic weapon to keep people in their place, a gracious invitation to life in God through Jesus Christ.

At the time Cunningham was Chief of Staff, second in charge of the worldwide Salvation Army. Bramwell Booth, eldest son of the founder, William Booth, and the second General, was showing symptoms of senility. The only plan for succession was as William had done - the name of his nominated successor locked in a safe.

The value of what Cunningham published is emphasised by the times in which he wrote and the position he held.

socio-critical insights to The Salvation Army in areas such as women's ministry and feminism, economic and justice issues across the Army world, the use of power in this hierarchical organisation. The need for life-related application echoes across the Army world; there can never be an end to this basic task of theology!

For me, and for many of my colleagues across the world, it has never been enough to equate the words with the Word. The words must be held at a distance, treated critically, with suspicion. It is too easy to read into those words what we imagine should be there, to import idols of our own making. There is an important critical task of explanation, to be carried out thoughtfully, with the best methods possible. I have responded gratefully as the tools became available, and people within my ministry have in most cases sensed something liberating and refreshing in the fruit of this work. It is heartening that this happens even when the other person operates from a more dogmatic framework. It is equally encouraging to see these positive outcomes when I succeed a Corps Officer who is more authoritarian in style. In this conjunction of styles, however, I am not always successful. The learning at this interface continues.

Having recorded that most of my colleagues are not satisfied "to equate the words with the Word", one thing that strikes me from the interviews with other officers is while the need for the critical task is acknowledged, there is only limited use of critical tools and method.<sup>59</sup> I sense a lack of conviction regarding the importance of the critical task, and the need to update skills. It is not hard to understand the tools but

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<sup>59</sup> pp 32 & 41 above.

it takes me considerable time to master them, to absorb and use them judiciously. This is part of the problem for others. Also it requires special effort within the theologically apathetic culture of The Salvation Army to move in this direction; there are many urgent day-to-day tasks to deflect us. The ‘suspicion’ of Ricoeur’s hermeneutic cannot be neglected.

At the same time the issue of the text can and does emerge for those using other methods, including dogmatic and authoritarian approaches. This simple insight is important when seeking to hear with respect those who take differing approaches. If there is a risk of misusing the text through lack of critical study, there is an equally grave risk in imagining that we can isolate the meaning of the text solely through critical study. Retrieval is not totally dependant on suspicion, certainly not totally dependant on critical method. God will reveal as God chooses! For example, straightforward devotional reading also allows the issue of the text to emerge. I need to emphasise this in my ministry and encourage people to confidence in straightforward reflective and devotional reading. I myself can even return to the Promise Box with a new trusting, better for the critical journey, confident in a post-critical naivete, able to agree with the text about an issue important to us both.

If there is an inconsistency among colleagues mentioned above in the suspicion task, there is also apparent inconsistency in retrieval. While the need most expressed is for application of scripture into our life situation, I discover preachers moving away from the texts most useful in personal devotions (Psalms, Gospel of John) to those that may

favour propositional and impersonal preaching (Epistles etc.)<sup>60</sup> - “we have barely begun to listen to symbols”.<sup>61</sup> I can only speculate on why this happens; my best guess is that we avoid the personal in preaching. The power of narrative and hymnic expression must emerge alongside legislation and exhortation. We must acknowledge that scriptural power and meaning is retrieved through other than merely verbal means. This has always been implicit within The Salvation Army, especially in our music. It needs to be explicit. The drama and ceremony of Salvation Army occasions can also be used more effectively to communicate scriptural power and meaning.

Salvationists across the world come to the text with their own horizons, each of us with the things we can see from our own perspective. The text too has its own horizon, its own world. We can never fully enter that world and see that same horizon, despite our desire to do so and our sometime belief that we can. In humility we must recognise that the text is a different world from ours. Salvationists do share a common concern with the text. The central theme and focus, the *issue* of the text is God and God’s redemptive purposes. This is Word behind the words. The horizon of the text comes as a question to my horizon as interpreter, and in this dialogue I become witness to the issue mediated by the text, to God and God’s redemptive purposes. The scriptures are the confession of faith that God has acted in history for salvation. I participate in, or experience, this event as it is manifested to me in the poetic discourse of the text. We seek such understanding of scriptural meaning using the power of symbol, metaphor and narrative in a constructive, post-critical retrieval of meaning and power. Suspicion takes us behind the text. Retrieval allows us into the

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<sup>60</sup> pp36 & 41 above.

<sup>61</sup> Paul Ricoeur cited above, p 47.

issue of the text. Thus used, the scriptures are quite properly the primary source of the revelation of God for The Salvation Army.

**Learnings:**

The chief learning for me in this project has been the degree to which hermeneutic approach affects ministry outcomes, how decisive it is for christian faith and practice. Authoritarian and dogmatic readings of scripture seem to lead to similar styles of ministry practice. Where scripture is recognised as gracious invitation into God's redemptive purposes, ministry outcomes are shaped and formed by this style of reading. The practice of ministry *is* applied hermeneutics, and the various pastoral tasks are inherently shaped by our own hermeneutic.

Preaching cries out for 'post-critical acts of imagination' suggests Thomas Long,<sup>62</sup>

... between an ancient text and any contemporary application of the text stands an act of imagination on the part of the interpreter. ... The connection between the text and the contemporary world is not procedural but poetic, not mechanical but metaphorical.<sup>63</sup>

I add the qualification that the procedural critical task is a necessary control and refinement of the 'act of imagination', part of the hermeneutical circle, on its own insufficient. The act of imagination goes beyond the 'there and then' and 'here and now' movement of much preaching to creatively engage the issue of the text. I have been helped in this by use of the lectionary, having grown up in a tradition of idiosyncratic selection of text. There is a discipline in its use that somehow allows the

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<sup>62</sup> T G Long, *The Use of Scripture in Contemporary Preaching*, in *Interpretation*, Vol 44 /4, 1990, pp 341-352.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*, p 347.

text to address me. Again there is some risk of procedure dominating interpretation, but recognised procedure can at least be put up for evaluation.

The preaching task continues to develop; with real joy when the dialogue with the issue of the text happens effectively.

Adult Christian Education has been a major focus of this study. Adults are keen to learn and earnestly seek understanding and transforming experience of God and God's redemptive purposes. In my experience hermeneutic method and practice determines and shapes the value of adult learning opportunities to a very large extent, suddenly for Ken Thompson as a newcomer to biblical study, and gradually for Jenny and Russell<sup>64</sup> who had been exposed to some form of christian education for as long as they could remember.

Without question any successful outcomes for the Bible Schools arise out of the issue that the text manifests, from God and God's redemptive purposes. Adequate hermeneutic method and sensitivity do assist that issue to emerge. This echoes clearly from all forms of feedback from the Bible Schools. A hermeneutic of suspicion and retrieval can be understood and used by adults - certainly the fruits of it can be intuitively appreciated, but also the mechanics of procedure can be brought to the fore. Adults enjoy being taken seriously, and they respond to high expectations for learning placed upon them in a situation of mutual trust.

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<sup>64</sup> Chapter 5 above.

In both pro-active and re-active pastoral care this developing hermeneutic practice forbids and excludes any formula responses and legalistic framework. The issue is Word emerging in flesh, an inside job. The pastor assists and leads (and is shaped and formed) but above all acknowledges the horizon of the other person and agrees that the issue is Word of God emerging in flesh.

Over recent years in two Corps I have introduced the Fresh Start programme. This is a seminar to assist people in recovery from separation and divorce. I have been aware for many years that a dominant hermeneutic style across most denominations has interpreted the pastoral issue of divorce in a way that seems to me directly opposed to God's redemptive purposes. There has been no word of grace for the divorced person, no forgiveness, no way forward in life and relationships. In this we have alienated a large proportion of the population and been unable to meet them at their point of need, to share their horizon. The outcomes in the lives of Fresh Start participants testify loudly against this inadequate, legalistic hermeneutic. I sense that the application of a hermeneutic of suspicion and retrieval to the issue of divorce contributed to the 'aha' experience of a number of people in the January Bible School.

The existence of 'Orders and Regulations' within The Salvation Army builds a perception of legalism in matters of church discipline. I interpret O&R's as a guideline to indicate that a situation should be addressed, and ultimately as a sanction if pastoral help and guidance is not received and responded to. Some people of more legalistic mindset seem to use them as a rigid tool to demonstrate the collective purity

of the 'faithful remnant' to the watching world, a world largely oblivious to such detail, a world seeking a community of grace in which to belong. The application of O&R's has sometimes become the event that reveals differing hermeneutic method. I can only apply them in a way that emerges from my own experience of God's grace, which shapes my developing hermeneutic, which in turn affects my experience of God.

Even the style and substance of administration within The Salvation Army is shaped by our hermeneutic. I have encountered a range of styles in administration, decision making and leadership. At its worst our structure empowers a dogmatic, authoritarian style. In the face of this, spiritual motivation and creative initiative wilt. Mediocrity is rewarded and risk-taking discouraged in a low trust, high control atmosphere. Self esteem and morale nosedive. Confidence is eroded in leadership which controls our destiny but cannot listen. At its best our hierarchical structure enables the right leaders to reverse this catalogue of ills. The difference seems to lie largely in the hermeneutic convictions of the person. Again, ministry is applied hermeneutics. This holds true at all levels of command, a conviction I trust will continue to shape the future, just as it has in the past.

The scriptures do shape and sustain the life of The Salvation Army. The expectation that scripture is primary in christian revelation is absorbed from earliest days within the salvationist ethos. In direct ways and in subtle ways the scriptures impact on the lives of salvationists of all ages to form christian faith and practice. This has emerged clearly in reflection on my own life and experience, and has been echoed in colleagues from across the world and within the local Corps. It is also true that our

best work remains to be done in the biblical formation of adults, especially in the direct and personal use of scripture.

Inevitably any culture that shapes and sustains us also controls and suppresses us. The extent to which life is suppressed within The Salvation Army is determined to a great degree by the hermeneutic that we apply. Scripture and life can be viewed through a narrow and constricting lens, and what we see is substantially what we get. We must develop and hold a hermeneutic that allows scripture to move towards us with its profound and searching questions, and with its gracious invitation to “life in all its fullness”.

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