Suffering for and to Christ in William Booth’s Eschatological Ecclesiology

On a given Sunday a visitor might walk into a Salvation Army worship service and hear the congregation confidently singing to the accompaniment of brass band one of their battle choruses: “I’ll go in the strength of the Lord/To conflicts which faith will require,/His grace as my shield and reward,/My courage and zeal shall inspire,/Since he gives the word of command,/To meet and encounter the foe,/With his sword of truth in my hand,/To suffer and triumph I’ll go.” The content of this song reflects the ecclesiological self-understanding of Salvationists who as members of the universal church are actively involved in the mission of God. Proclaiming this dangerously boisterous message is the ecclesiological heritage of the Salvation Army. The early Army and its leader, William Booth, embraced an eschatologically flavored ecclesiology that specifically called it soldiers to be prepared to suffer in the dire districts of life as soldiers of the cross. William Booth explained that Jesus Christ’s missional mandate to go into all the world meant suffering for and to Christ.

Though it is not likely that Salvationists around the world are explicitly concerned with ecclesiology as a study, following its founder the Salvation Army is implicitly acting on its doctrine of the church, which is rooted in mission. Consequently ecclesiological reflection within the Salvation Army must always consider missional aspects when evaluating its ecclesiology. Systematic theologian, Jürgen Moltmann, dramatically suggests, “What we have to learn from them [missional movements] is not that the church ‘has’ a mission, but the very reverse: that the mission of Christ creates its own church. Mission does not come from the church; it is from

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mission and in the light of mission that the church has to be understood.”2 It is this missional
direction which unites Booth’s bold “bass drum” ecclesiology with his eschatology because
“marching to war” for the “salvation of the world” is seen in the context of the holistic and
universal mission of God. The influence of eschatology on ecclesiology is pivotal for how we
understand the mission of William Booth and for how that mission can be interpreted today.
How one views the end dramatically informs the way one theologically understands the church
and its missional relationship to that end.

William Booth’s Eschatological Ecclesiology

The particular approach toward ecclesiology demonstrated in William Booth’s
theological praxis necessarily mingles with his personal and universal eschatology. He fervently
desired the eternal salvation of souls and the world’s eternal salvation represented in his
millennialism. To say that William Booth had an eschatological ecclesiology is to state that his
ecclesiology is formulated on the basis of his desire to redeem individual persons and the world
for eternity, whatever the cost.

Pertinent to discussion about the ecclesiology observed in William Booth’s theology is
the question of whether an ecclesiology can exist implicitly. Can there be a doctrine of the
church if there is no explicit and official articulation of the same? If an ecclesiology is
unmistakably developed theologically, is it more faithful than an implied ecclesiology? Such
systems are so active in “being the church” that these movements do not take time to formulate
an official ecclesiology.3 Through church history the unarticulated ecclesiological systems have

3 Such ecclesologies then come close to what Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon urge the church to pursue
in their landmark book Resident Aliens (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989) where they challenge the church to be an
alternative community to the world that embodies what being the church truly means. They challenge the Christian
often changed the direction of the church, more than the explicitly classified ecclesiologies, like Pietism, Moravianism, early Methodism, along with Salvationism.

Every ecclesiology is at least partially prompted by its eschatology. This statement assumes a teleological model that dictates that the church is living in response to the way it understands the end. The church is the visible sign of the present and coming kingdom of God. When eschatology is connected to ecclesiology, the church can see the future victory of God as a reality impacting the here and now.

**William Booth’s Eschatological Ecclesiology**

During the formative years of the Salvation Army its ecclesiology was (as most areas of its development) extremely practical. Salvation Army theologian R. David Rightmire explains, “Booth had a functional ecclesiology, conceiving the church as ‘act’ rather than ‘substance.’” The importance of personal eschatology, expressed in Booth’s desire to save souls, was lodged within in the concept of the Army’s universal mission to save the world. This mission was the ‘greatest good’ of Booth’s utilitarian-like ethic.

“The good time coming” was the way that William Booth often referred to the approaching millennial kingdom, a kingdom for which the Salvation Army was pragmatically and theologically established. William Booth was a person referred to in today’s terminology as a postmillennialist. His eschatological views of the kingdom of God were never more clearly

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4 This is a debated point for some churches seem to be motivated by nothing but maintaining the status quo. A state church ecclesiology is motivated by an eschatological system that might seek to maintain or justify the status quo this is only seen in a realized eschatology. A realized eschatology views the first coming of Jesus Christ as inaugurating his kingdom. This kingdom is a spiritual or existential reality within the hearts of the believers or the church.


stated than in the title of his August 1890 article, “The Millennium; or, The Ultimate Triumph of Salvation Army Principles.” In this article Booth asserts that:

A genuine Salvationist is a true reformer of men. He alone is a real socialist, because he is the advocate of the only true principles by which the reformation of society can be effected. His confidence for the future is not based alone on the theories he holds,…but in that Millennial heaven…to him, the millennium is already in a measure, an accomplished fact.

William Booth was working to realize the kingdom of God on earth. He was a man motivated by the possibility of the redemption of the world. This motivation was based in large measure on his understanding of eschatology, which to him was measured on a global scale with a global mandate. When ontologically defining Salvationist self-understanding and its millennial task, he explains, “Salvationism means simply the overcoming and banishing from the earth of wickedness, inward and outward, from the heart and life of man, and the establishment of the principles of purity and goodness instead.” William Booth understood the millennium in terms of global harmony; the means of arriving at such a state was through the agency of soldiers in the great salvation war. Booth commanded, “Soldiers! You are to do this! [fulfill the prophecies that will bring universal peace]….there is but one way to reach this millennium of peace and good will…there is but one way to the world’s deliverance, and that is by fighting.”

Fighting for Booth clearly meant human agents escorting the millennium into reality.

As the Salvation Army grew, so did the need for the institutionalization of its mission and practices. Hence, the Army eventually became its own ecclesial body, but the core missional direction still reigned in the Army.

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Suffering and the Army

The ecclesiology of the early Salvation Army is one that called its soldiers to the world and to a fight against the evil therein. “Suffering” can be defined as undergoing pain, distress, injury, or loss. Suffering is something that happens beyond the norm of human comfort. It is not a surprise then that William Booth called his Army to suffer for the expansion of Christ’s kingdom. This theme of suffering is uniquely tied to the Salvation Army’s Wesleyan understanding of holiness.

When Metaphor Becomes Reality

In 1865 William Booth found his destiny while preaching in London’s East End, when he formed The East London Christian Revival Society. Later known as the Christian Mission, this group was motivated to preach the gospel to the poor of London’s East End, a segment of the population that was generally neglected by the Church in the Victorian era. During these thirteen years the Christian Mission grew to include 75 preaching stations and 120 evangelists throughout Britain. The eschatological perspective that accompanied this fledging mission was dominated by personal eschatology.

In 1878 the Christian Mission changed its name to the Salvation Army. This change of identity is the first clear indication of a personal shift in William Booth’s theology, which adjusted from personal redemptive categories to institutional redemptive categories. This new

11 Also referred to as The East London Christian Revival Union or East London Christian Mission these names appeared interchangeably in the formative years of the movements. See Rightmire, 28-29n. and John R Rhemick, A New People of God: A Study in Salvationism (Des Plaines, ILL: The Salvation Army, 1993), 17.
12 That is to say that the Salvation Army was viewed by William Booth as institutionally sanctified to bring redemption to the world. Roger Green explains that these “institutional” categories were “sustained by his [Booth’s] belief that The Salvation Army was divinely ordained, and that it was a renewal in the nineteenth century and twentieth century of the Church of the New Testament, the early Church, the Reformation Church, and the Wesleyan revival.” War on Two Fronts: The Redemptive Theology of William Booth (Atlanta: The Salvation Army, 1989), 54-55.
theology is made clear in a popular (and often quoted) article by William Booth entitled “Our New Name—The Salvationist” in *The Salvationist*\(^{13}\) from January 1, 1879:

> We are a salvation people—this is our specialty…Our work is salvation. We believe in salvation and we have salvation….We aim at salvation. We want this and nothing short of this and we want this right off. My brethren, my comrades, soul saving is our avocation, the great purpose and business of our lives. Let us seek first the Kingdom of God, let us be Salvationist indeed.\(^{14}\)

The alteration is most obviously seen in the pragmatic shift to transform the structure of the Christian Mission to the military structure of the Salvation Army. When the military metaphor was adopted, every area of Booth’s movement was affected: preaching stations became corps, evangelists became corps officers, members became soldiers, and its leader became the General. An autocratic form of leadership emerged, and like a conquering Army, the fingers of the Salvation Army were stretched around the world. Roger J. Green explains that at this time Booth’s theology began to move from individual categories to institutional categories. Indeed, William Booth saw his Salvation Army as institutionally sanctified to bring about the Kingdom of God on earth.\(^{15}\) It is at this juncture that the universal eschatology of William Booth sharpened into focus. His Salvation Army was, in his mind, the vehicle that would facilitate the coming millennium. Within eight years of the 1878 name change, the Salvation Army exploded to include 1,749 corps, and 4,129 officers.\(^{16}\) Indicative of this time is Booth’s commissioning of a corporate eschatological task: “Go to them all. The whole fourteen hundred millions [sic]. Don’t despair. *It can be done*. It SHALL BE DONE. God has sent The Salvation Army on the task. If

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\(^{13}\) It should be noted that this was written in connection with the change of name of the Army’s journal from *The Christian Mission Magazine* to *The Salvationist*.


\(^{15}\) See William Booth’s article “The Millennium,” 341. In this article Booth paints a picture of the coming millennial kingdom that envisions London as the New Jerusalem.

every saint on earth would do his duty, it could be done effectually in the next ten years. If the Salvation Army will be true to God, it will be done during the next fifty” [emphasis Booth’s].

Battle images were rigorously employed as the Salvation Army sought to identify along the lines of an Army. The Salvation Army was, as one author has said, a group of “soldiers without swords,” whose mission had a singular focus of winning the world for Christ. Did the military metaphor create its own reality as a result of the way that its adherents adopted its mission? Booth and his Army saw themselves in a fight with a supreme purpose. Within the realm of historical theology it is easy to conclude that the Salvation Army’s militarism developed an eschatological ecclesiology that rearticulated what God’s people were to be about in this world. The metaphor of an Army “marching through the land” created new ways to express the mission of God. William Booth could challenge his troupes the same way a military General would. Concepts such as suffering, the theme of this conference, could be explored within the military metaphor in a way that traditional churches could not.

Calling its members to risk their lives for the gospel of Jesus Christ could be swallowed within the metaphoric Army. For Booth joining the Army as a soldier meant a risk; it meant that in the great salvation war one might sacrifice his or her own self interest for the greatest good of winning the world for Christ. In an article titled, “The War Spirit” Booth challenged his soldiers to consider “the destiny of millions…[that] is hanging in the balance—depending to an awful extent on the enthusiastic, skilful, and self-sacrificing, [sic] conduct, and maintenance of this war….Let us go back to the example of our Great Commander-in-Chief…and follow

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17 William Booth, “Go!” All the World (November, 1884) found in The General’s Letters, 1885 (London: International Headquarters, 1890), 7. This demonstrates an amazing parallel between Booth and Finney, particularly Finney’s claim, in 1835, that if the church does its job the millennium could come in three years.

him….Yours for the thick of the fight, William Booth.”\textsuperscript{19} Around such battle cries of its General, the Army went to war. Suffering in the battle was further understood in light of eschatological rewards. Suffering is often accompanied by themes of eternal victory. An example of this is the song quoted earlier, which proclaims that the soldier is go “to suffer \textit{and triumph}” (emphasis mine).

\textbf{Suffering for Christ}

Booth often described the activity and mission of the Army, and implicitly its rich ecclesiological tradition, as “the fight.”\textsuperscript{20} What did Booth mean by fighting? He explains that “A good solider is always a fighting man….Fighting means hardship and labour, and hunger, and wounds, and suffering, and life-sorrow and death.”\textsuperscript{21} The suffering in the throws of the fight for the Salvationist is “for” Christ. The “fight” was a service for the Lord, and for early Salvationists anything done on behalf of Christ’s kingdom was worth earthly pain. William Booth was very clear about the perils involved in the salvation war. In his article titled, “The Risks” he challenges soldiers to “Come out and place yourselves [sic], with every power you possess for doing or suffering at the Master’s feet.”\textsuperscript{22} This statement shows that suffering is done for Christ; suffering is something sacrificed for Jesus Christ himself. Often Booth, and early Army writers, compared suffering for Christ to the sufferings of Christ on the cross. An early leader in the Salvation Army, George Scott Railton, who officially led the Army’s expansion to the United States challenged, “Let cowards seek an easier way/And win the praise of men;/Cross bearing,
dying day by day,/Is still the Master’s plan.”

William Booth’s son-in-law, Fredrick Booth-Tucker, wrote a hymn published in the *War Cry* on August 14, 1897 that is still sung today when new officers are commissioned, “They say the fighting is too hard,/My strength of small avail,/When foes beset and friends are fled,/My faith must surely fail./But, O how can I quit my post/While millions sin-bound lie?/I cannot leave the dear old flag,/’Twere better far to die.”

Suffering for Christ also had an evangelistic aim. The risks of suffering in the fight can help to achieve the goal of others being drawn to the Gospel. Booth explained, “Whenever men suffer for Christ’s sake, not only does God draw near to bless, but men draw near to enquire.”

The eschatological focus of William Booth’s theology was accompanied by his understanding that Christians should give of themselves (i.e. suffer) to bring the world to Jesus Christ. When comparing the relationship of suffering to the eschatological task, Booth explained, “Suffering and saving are terms of almost the same significance in the Christian’s career. If he suffers for Christ he saves, and if he saves he suffers. These men [the apostles] suffered for Christ, and saved with a vengeance. If they had dodged the suffering they would have never saved at all.”

**Suffering to Christ**

A theology of suffering was articulated in 1884 by William Booth in an article simply titled, “Go!” This article appeared in the Salvation Army’s international periodical *All the World*. In this article Booth explains that it is the task of all Christians as expressed in Mark 16:15 to “Go into all the world…” He explains that “Going meant suffering to Christ: it meant this to the Apostles. They went to the world: this meant going to scorn, poverty, stripes, imprisonment,

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25 Booth, *Salvation Soldiery*, 44.

death—cruel deaths. If you go you will have to suffer; there is no other way of going.” What is implied by the three words “suffering to Christ”? The use of this preposition seems out of place, some critics might see it as a mistake, but William Booth had, it seems, a much deeper meaning in mind when he described Christian suffering as “to Christ.”

In this quote William Booth explains that intrinsic to Christian life is suffering. One way to understand Booth’s words here is by considering when Christ called his follower to “go,” he expected that they would suffer because of their going. Hence, Jesus thought going into the world meant suffering for the person who answered the call. Just as going meant suffering to the disciples, going meant suffering to Jesus. Booth demonstrates how the apostles followed this call and Salvationists should expect to find the same suffering along their way. The metaphor of a Salvation Army enabled the reader to understand the seriousness of Jesus call.

Another way to understand William Booth’s challenge, in this article, is through Booth’s social theology that valued all of humanity as created in the image of God. “Going” then means serving Christ in the form of hurting individuals. If the Spirit of Christ resides in individual Salvationists, then Christ suffers with these individuals. Conversely if the people the Army serves in the “slums,” cause soldiers to suffer, then their suffering is to Christ. Though the words “incarnational ministry” have become “buzz words” in evangelical circles, William Booth did see his service not only ‘for’ Christ, but ‘to’ Christ as well. Essentially when Christian soldiers are serving their neighbors, they are serving Christ. For such a mandate consider Jesus’ words in Matthew 25:40, “just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (NRSV). Catherine Booth, who has been called the “cofounder”28 of the Salvation Army, also recognized the significance of suffering with the poor: “Oh, for grace

28 See Roger J. Green, Catherine Booth: Cofounder of the Salvation Army (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996).
always to see Him where He is to be seen, for verily, flesh and blood doth not reveal this unto us!
Well … I keep seeing Him risen again in the forms of drunkards and ruffians of all
descriptions.”

In the same way Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37) redefines the way
that humanity looks at “neighbors.” William Booth recognized the importance of this passage for
early Salvation Army hospitality ministries as he frames this pericope in sacramental terms,
(which is somewhat ironic for a non-practicing-sacramental denomination), by urging soldiers
“to observe continually the sacrament of the Good Samaritan.”

Such an incarnational perspective shaped a distinct missional ecclesiology. Similarly
Bramwell Booth illustrated:

When I see the poor, shivering creatures gathered in the warmth and comfort of our Shelters, and
the famished ones in the Food Depots, and the workless hard at work, and the lost and lonely in
the bright hopefulness of the Women’s and Children Homes, and the prisoners—set in happy
families in our Harbours of Refuge, my heart sings for joy, and I say, ‘Is not this the Christ come
again?’ If he came now to London and Boston and New York and Melbourne and Tokio [sic], as
He came to Jerusalem and Nazareth and Caesarea, would He not want to do exactly this? I
believe He would!

“Suffering to Christ” is a theme that encapsulates William Booth’s ecclesiology in a unique and
powerful way. Suffering was an intrinsic aspect of the identity of Salvationists. William Booth
saw this as a call of Christ, and his incarnational Army saw the need of seeing Christ in those
whom they served. If one was merely called to suffer “for” Christ, then obligation might overcast
a call that is vital to the Salvationist’s identity. Instead Salvationists suffered because they were
Christians; they suffered because they served others as if they were Christ himself.

29 Catherine Booth, quoted in Bramwell Booth, These Fifty Years (London: Cassel, 1929), 45-46.
30 William Booth, quoted in Sandall, The History of The Salvation Army, 3:59; Fairbank, Booth’s Boots: Social
Service Beginnings in The Salvation Army (London: The Salvation Army, 1983), 184; Philip Needham, “Towards A
Re-Integration Of The Salvationist Mission” in Creed and Deed: Toward a Christian theology of social services in
Suffering Salvationists

The stark change that occurred in the lives of sinners who joined the ranks of the Salvation Army had an impact on social and economic factors of a given area. The business of bars and pubs dropped drastically with the absence of their best customers who were now abstaining soldiers. There are many incidents in the Army’s history of mobs forming to combat the open-air meeting of the Salvation Army. In the 1880s opposition groups were organized and often called Skeleton Armies. Often the Skeleton constituents were the bar managers and brewers of a given town. In one case the Skeletons were a full fledged copy of the Salvation Army soldiers with their own uniforms, flags, and bass drums. In 1882, at the height of the Army’s expansion, the Army officially noted that 669 soldiers and officers had been “knocked down, kicked, or otherwise brutally assaulted,” forty percent of these people being women and children.

The salvation war produced two persons promoted to glory, or two martyrs, Captain Sarah Broadbent and Captain Susan Beaty. In 1884 while serving in Worthing, Broadbent decided to hold a prayer meeting instead of an open air meeting since the open airs had caused pandemonium in her town. That evening the mobs were surprised not to find the local corps in the streets. Sandall described tragic events that followed: “[The opposition group] marched to Showham [the location of the corps in the town], smashed all the windows of the corps hall there, and in the course of the rioting the officer in charge (Captain Sarah J. Broadbent) received her death-blow from a flying stone.” Beaty’s promotion was more gradual. In the midst of a

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33 For more information on these groups see Glen K. Horridge, The Salvation Army Origins and Early Days: 1865-1900 (Surrey: Ammonite, 1993), 92-100. He explains that an opposition group in Whitechapel called themselves the Unconverted Salvation Army. Similarly in Guildford a group called itself the “Red (-Nose) Army.”
34 Sandall, The History of the Salvation Army, 2:181. Sandall explains that these numbers are likely incomplete.
mob attack in Hastings, she was repeatedly kicked; her death in 1889 was said to have been caused by internal injuries from the incident.\textsuperscript{36}

Throughout the next several years Salvationists sustained multiple injuries in the heat of the battle--from Samuel Logan Brengle who was sidelined for being hit in the head by a brick, to Major Euguen Nsingaini who in 1998, during his country’s Civil War, was gunned down in the Congo because of his participation in a peace initiative.\textsuperscript{37}

If there is any theological way of understanding this commitment to the battle, it is through the Salvation Army’s Wesleyan roots. The passionate way that Salvationists lived and proclaimed the doctrine of holiness sustained them during the fight. The Army took the torch from John Wesley who understood that holiness was social and personal. Totally loving God and neighbor was possible only through the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit. Brengle appropriately underscores the Salvation Army ecclesiology of suffering when he said the Lord’s “greatest servants have often been the greatest sufferers. They have gathered up in themselves and endured all the pains and woes, sorrows and agonies, fierce and cruel martyrdoms of humanity, and so have been able to minister to all its vast and pitiful needs, and comfort its voiceless sorrow.”\textsuperscript{38}

**Evaluating the Army’s Ecclesiology**

William Booth’s ecclesiology was one that dramatically called the Church to consider its call to mission and to expect to suffer while going about that mission. Such an ecclesiological understanding was developed as the eschatologically focused Army understood itself to be in a battle to save the world. The kingdom of Christ and the gospel of that kingdom found a new

\textsuperscript{37}The Officer (December: 1998).
expression in Booth’s Salvation Army. When looking critically at the life of William Booth it is easy to see that he was an imperfect man. His autocratic leadership was a weakness that expressed itself in poor relationships with three of his children who left the ministry of the Salvation Army. Another weakness is that at times his eschatology verged on viewing the Army as the sole agent for bringing in the millennium. Theologically there are many ways that he was “rough around the edges.” One area that William Booth was theologically on target was his ecclesiology. His doctrine of the church incorporated the place of the Church as a restoring agent in the world. That is the restoration of personal and social evil. This eschatologically motivated ecclesiology, which called people to suffer for Christ is a rich theological heritage that the contemporary Army has inherited. Evaluating William Booth’s ecclesiology today is a task that is of great significance for the contemporary Salvation Army as it seeks a historically informed mission. Often scholars of the Salvation Army assume that because Booth’s ecclesiology was conditioned by his eschatology, his ecclesiology was hence insufficient. This study is a call for a revision of the Salvation Army’s historiography regarding William Booth’s ecclesiology.

Assessing Green’s Evaluation

Contemporary scholars do not always view the impact of William Booth’s eschatology in a positive light. Some assume that Booth’s eschatology, particularly his understanding of the millennium, created a deficient ecclesiology. Such a position is taken by Salvation Army scholar Roger Green who in his article “Facing History: Our Way Ahead for a Salvationist Theology” concludes that the contemporary Salvation Army has inherited a “weak ecclesiology.” He asserts that Booth’s ecclesiology was weak for two reasons: his postmillennialism and the

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39 At this point I must explain that the scholarship of Roger Green has been very important to me. Many Salvationist a around the world are the beneficiaries of his research. The discussion that follows does not reduce my admiration for his scholarship.
distancing of the Army from the institutional church after the failed merger with the Church of England. The latter claim is not being challenged in this paper; rather the question is Green’s claim that Booth’s postmillennialism contributed to a weak ecclesiology. Green states, “Postmillennial theology does not comport well with a strong ecclesiology, especially when one’s doctrine of the Church is seen primarily through Army lenses.”

A definition is needed for the term “weak.” It appears that Green is suggesting that “weak” is a lack of strength. Green’s argument that the contemporary Army has inherited a weak ecclesiology seems to have two points of contention. His first argument is that postmillennialism does not create a lasting ecclesiology because it supposedly did not plan for the future. His second argument is centered on the fact that Booth was ecclesiastically inconsistent in his definitions of the Army’s *raison d’etre* (i.e. “reason for existence”). Green’s second claim demands a distinction between ecclesiastical structures and ecclesiology. William Booth was inconsistent when speaking ecclesiastically. Ecclesiological and ecclesiastical are, however, different terms. Booth’s unpredictable ecclesiastic language refers more to the organization of the movement, whereas, suggesting that Booth possessed a “weak ecclesiology” is proposing that he had an incomplete doctrine of the church. Green’s final point of argument is that Booth’s ecclesiology is weak because it de-emphasized ecclesiastical structures. In fact Booth was proposing an alternative structure that was far more effective than the ecclesiastical structures of his day.

The pragmatically-minded William Booth saw a great eschatological goal. That goal was saving the world. Despite Green’s claim that postmillennialism does not comport very well with

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42 There are various lexical definitions of “weak”: “1: lacking strength or vigor….2 not able to sustain or resist much weight, pressure, or strain….3 deficient in vigor of mind or character….4 not supported by truth or logic….5 not able to function properly….6 lacking skill or proficiency…” *The Merriam-Webster Concise School and Office Dictionary* (Springfield, MA: Mirriam-Webster, Inc., 1991), 594.
a sturdy ecclesiology, the opposite can be seen in the denominations that were birthed as a result of the nineteenth century holiness revival.\textsuperscript{43} For instance the Wesleyan and Free Methodist churches which were born out of desire to see ecclesiology matched with mission in the world. These denominations are noted for their stands against slavery.

William Booth was continually defining the early Army, his letters and sermons giving regular emphasis (sometimes overemphasis) to what it meant to be a Salvationist. This provided an ecclesial self-understanding for the young Army. An implicit ecclesiology that lacks classical formulation does not necessarily dictate a “weak” ecclesiology. Booth’s writings are saturated with ecclesiological statements concerning the mission and aims of the Salvation Army. What is implicit is direct theological definition about ecclesiology. His inconsistent ecclesiastical jargon does not negate the content and missional purpose of those statements. Sociologically this creates difficulties in identifying the Salvation Army as a “church” or “sect” along the lines of the typology of Ernst Troeltsch and others. Sociological difficulties do not however necessitate theological deficiency.\textsuperscript{44} At the forefront of Roger Green’s argument about Booth’s “weak” ecclesiology is his desire to see the Army move toward church-like categories. Green notes, “I have long been convinced that the only way to approach a correct historical analysis that leads to a truthful institutional self-understanding is to impose the sect/church distinctions developed in the discipline of sociology upon ourselves.”\textsuperscript{45} He then encourages Salvationist to accept the “historical fact” that the Army has moved from being a sect to a church and should hence

\textsuperscript{43} See Dayton, \textit{Discovering and Evangelical Heritage} (Hendrickson Publishers, 1976).
\textsuperscript{45} Green, “Facing History,” 29.
evaluate what sectarian distinctives should be maintained.\textsuperscript{46} Missionally-directed movements are not governed by sociology; they are motivated by God’s word, which challenges them to be an active body “preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ and meeting human needs in his name without discrimination.”\textsuperscript{47} When mission directs the church, it forms an alternative ecclesiology that is often more in tune with Scripture than the sociologically classified “church” or “denomination.”

To criticize William Booth’s ecclesiology as “weak” is to force his missionally-directed movement into a box of intellectual abstractions. William Booth’s ecclesiology was missional. He was unconcerned with theological abstractions and discussions. Philip Needham’s book \textit{Community in Mission} rightly places the context for a Salvationist ecclesiology in the context of mission. The ecclesiological thesis of this work is that “a Salvationist ecclesiology stands as a reminder to the Church that its mission in the world is primary and that the life of the Church ought largely to be shaped by a basic commitment to mission.”\textsuperscript{48} A missional ecclesiology is exactly where the Army should be if it is to be at all true to its historical and theological heritage.

Because Green uses the comparative term “weak,” it is difficult to distinguish what ecclesiology he is assuming to be adequate for the contemporary Salvation Army. He maintains that the Salvation Army must embrace a view of history that is different from the Booth’s postmillennialism.\textsuperscript{49} His proposes that the Army shed any trace of postmillennialism and proposes that that Salvationists embrace the biblical language of the Kingdom of God when
looking at history. This proposal is warmly welcomed for such language is indeed something that
the contemporary Army should embrace, but the spirit of William Booth’s millennialism is not
juxtaposed to this language.

When moving toward the future the Army must evaluate its heritage in order to progress
with historically directed confidence. It seems that the ecclesiological heritage that William
Booth fashioned for his Army is something that should be maintained. Why? Because this
ecclesiology keeps the Salvation Army focused on mission, this ecclesiology keeps inter related
themes of suffering and the holiness alive.

Conclusion

William Booth’s functional, biblically based, missional ecclesiology was formed
alongside the metaphor of an Army. This metaphor created new ways for the mission of God to
be expressed in the world particularly as it related to suffering. Booth called the Salvation Army
to suffer as it lived out its ecclesiology; suffering went hand in hand with being a soldier. The
pulse of this ecclesiology was William Booth’s eschatology. His impassioned desire to win the
world for Jesus produced a missional ecclesiology. Booth saw the church as necessarily active;
he comments on this purpose, “…there can be no question that it is of God that those who are on
the Lord’s side should aim at this great and godlike purpose [defeat the devil and delivering souls
from hell], and direct and devote all their energies to its accomplishment.”50 The question is not
whether the Army has a “weak” or “strong” ecclesiology, but whether it is faithful to Jesus and
the gospel of his kingdom and whether it is functional today. The contemporary Salvation Army
has inherited an ecclesiology from William Booth that is faithful in these things—this legacy is
worthy of the Army’s time and celebration.

50 William Booth, “A Good Soldier of Jesus Christ,” The Founder Speaks Again (London: The Salvation Army,
1960), 49.


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