

Healing and Wholeness

By Emma Knights

Abstract

This article looks at wholeness and healing within The Salvation Army in the United Kingdom and considers whether the approach taken has changed within The Salvation Army since 1920. William Booth produced a memorandum in 1902 entitled: 'Faith Healing. A memorandum for the use of Officers of The Salvation Army.' This was republished in the 1930s but seems to have been side-lined over recent years. The author suggests that for too long healing and wholeness have been implied within The Salvation Army rather than made explicit. The article raises the suggestion that they should be seen as central to the work and ministry of The Salvation Army.

Healing and wholeness are not new topics for The Salvation Army. Doctrine 10, one of the eleven *Articles of Faith* which General William Booth, as founder, confirmed in the Deed of Constitution 1878, states: "We believe that it is the privilege of all believers to be wholly sanctified, and that their whole spirit, soul and body may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." The latest edition of the *Handbook of Doctrine* (2010:196) gives a recent interpretation of Doctrine 10, saying that "the God who sanctifies us is the healing God who makes us whole" (Psalms 30:2, 103:3 are quoted).

Dr G. Calvert (1997:11), a General Practitioner and participant in a 2001 Conference in Sri Lanka on 'Health, healing and wholeness within The Salvation Army', states: "Health, healing and wholeness have been desired outcomes of Salvation Army activity from the very beginning." In its very early days The Salvation Army reached out to those who were on the edge of society. People were challenged to come forward to the 'penitent form' to receive salvation and holiness. At the same time, physical healings took place in answer to prayer. The 1878 confirmation by William Booth of the doctrine of the sanctification of the body as well as the soul and spirit was accompanied by an interest in physical healing. In the *War Cry* from 1882 to 1884 there are eleven detailed accounts of healing: both the healing of people

attending Salvation Army meetings and the healing of its officers. In 1883 the *War Cry* (28th February 1883:2) carried a report of healing, by faith, of a case of consumption at the Liverpool 3 Corps. The report gave the man's name and address so that people - if they wanted - could see him and confirm the truth of the account. A few months later, there was an eyewitness account by Major Dowdle of Captain Rapkin's healing. Dowdle states: "Myself and my wife were witnesses to the foregoing marvellous cure of my aide-de-camp Captain Rapkin's eyesight, on the 1st May 1883." (23rd May 1883:1). It is clear that healing was being publicised. A major way in which it was substantiated was through testimony.

Captain Rapkin became an advocate of prayer for healing. In giving an account of his life and his healing he said: "I was forcibly struck with the words in Matthew 8:17, and knew that Christ could heal as well now as he could when on earth." In his detailed account of the restoration of his eyesight he stated that after praying he "arose from his knees perfectly healed with my sight fully restored" (23rd May 1883:2) In the *War Cry* of the 16th June 1883 Captain Rapkin gave four accounts of healing that had taken place in the Northern Division.

In 1902 General William Booth issued a pamphlet entitled "Faith Healing: A Memorandum for use of the Officers of The Salvation Army" In the preface, General Booth stated, "the greatest of all the dangers of this day is believing too little, not believing too much". (1902:Preface). Writing at the beginning of the twentieth century, General Booth wanted to make it clear that right from the early development of The Salvation Army he had believed in faith healing. Bramwell Booth (1926:53), described instances of men and women falling to the ground, for example on January 16th 1878 at Whitechapel, and crying out for deliverance, both spiritual and physical. Bramwell Booth (1926:57) wrote:

We have not merely recognized that the healing of the sick by the power of God has from the beginning been associated with the office of prophets, priests, teachers and apostles, but it has always seemed to us in perfect harmony with the views and experience of the Army itself that God should heal the sick after this fashion. Not only has nothing to the contrary ever been taught amongst us, but far and near we have insisted upon the fact that God does raise up the sick in answer to our prayers, and numerous

instances, as I have said, of this healing ministry have occurred throughout our history.

Bramwell Booth was talking about physical healing and the concept of spiritual deliverance. The concept of wholeness in regards to healing had not been fully developed at this time, and so healing was understood in terms of spiritual and physical healing. William and Bramwell Booth appeared never to doubt God's ability to heal the sick through prayer and the laying on of hands. On the 7th February 1920 the front page of the *War Cry* was given up to the issue of 'Healing'. It was declared boldly that spiritual and physical healing were twin aims in the Army's programme. The *Staff Review* in 1931 reprinted William Booth's memorandum on Faith Healing first published in 1902. The editor (1931:29) stated that "widespread interest is again being taken in the subject of divine healing amongst Christian people of many denominations in Great Britain, the Dominions, America, the continent of Europe and in Missionary lands". He acknowledged that "from time to time articles or letters of inquiry on the subject reach the editor, which indicates that the clear teaching of the Founder on the subject is by no means familiar". The editor pointed out current errors in claims and teaching regarding healing. He suggested:

Of the many hundreds of persons who went forward in [healing] meetings it is very difficult to find any considerable number who have been healed, not more than between 5 per cent and 10 per cent. Many of them came many miles in the hope of being healed. Some of those who professed at being healed appear to be as bad as, if not worse than, before.

This was not calculated to encourage belief in prayer for healing. The editor concluded by stating: "Those definitely healed were healed as a result of their individual faith in Christ, through claiming the fulfilment of his promises for themselves."

The aim of reprinting the memorandum of General William Booth was for the instruction of Officers and then the dissemination of that information and teaching to the soldiers and members of the local churches. According to the *Staff Review* editor, many people had been drawn away by healing evangelists and the teaching was to counteract the unscriptural and misleading views people had been receiving from these evangelists. The Salvation Army was caught between its own radical

history and the growing Pentecostalism of the time. After the First World War, Pentecostalism was thriving in England. (Randall, 1999:206-230). During this period of its life, The Salvation Army became increasingly settled, and could even be described as being acceptable, after its turbulent beginnings, including its acceptance of the drunks and down and outs. Pentecostal healing meetings attracted especially those who had been injured in the war and left unable to work, or who could not afford health care. It was in this period that The Salvation Army began to move from individual care, including the ministry of prayer for the healing of individuals, to a programme of social services and care for many people. One of the main advocates of the traditional teaching on individual holiness in this period within The Salvation Army was Samuel Logan Brengle. Rightmire states that “Brengle insisted that holiness comprises both body and soul” (2003:141).

In the 1960s there was a dramatic increase in the number of similar articles about healing and wholeness. This is the first mention of the term wholeness in conjunction with healing within The Salvation Army. The terminology appears to become more holistic, concerned with the whole body, mind and spirit rather than only physical healing or spiritual deliverance. In the *The Officer* (August 1966:505), Lieutenant-Colonel Daniel Anderson, declares: “In the British Territory it is decided that a Sunday should be set aside annually for the consideration of the needs of the sick and those who tend them.” He states categorically:

If the ministry of healing, as taught by our Lord, concerns every disciple – the soldiery of every corps – it also concerns the whole man. How can and should corps today fulfil Christ’s commands to his disciples? It can do so within the corps fellowship, in outreach from the corps into the community in which it is placed.

Following the instruction to set one Sunday aside each year for a Ministry of Healing Sunday, and some discussion that took place about healing in the later 1960s, it was not until 1985 that *The Officer* magazine carried material on divine healing. In that year there were three articles on “Avenues of Healing” written by Mrs Commissioner Flora Larsson. In the articles she talks about her own experiences of praying with people and seeing them healed. She states that:

Healing is a person to person ministry and silent intercession is the simplest channel we can use. It is a caring ministry, not confined to mature Christians but one in which young and old can join equally. Healing is needed for the whole person: body, mind and soul (1985:261).

There was a letter written by Mrs Brigadier E.Haskins (1985:366) which detailed an occasion where the Corps treasurer prayed for her and she was healed. She wrote:

One night I was in terrible pain with my leg. The Corps Treasurer wanted to know what was wrong. After I explained he said: 'I will pray all night that the Lord may heal you'. In the middle of the night I was in agony. I had forgotten all about the promised prayer. I said to my lieutenant 'please take off the bedclothes. I am in terrible pain'. When I looked at my leg, the wound was not there. The skin was as perfect as on the rest of my leg. When the Doctor visited me he had to admit that only God could do such a thing.

Divine healing was once again being written about and shared amongst the officers of The Salvation Army, for a while at least. In November 1985 Mrs Mary Weaver (1985:503) wrote in *The Officer* that "God is in the business of redeeming the whole man – body, soul and spirit. We are not ourselves if we leave him out of any area".

The Salvation Army's statement on the theology of healing (Calvert 1997:179-182) says:

We believe: while God intended health and wholeness for his creation through sin the world has become sick and is in need of healing and hope (Rom.8:20-21). Because of God's loving nature he has not abandoned the world. Rather, he has taken upon himself our sin, sickness, and suffering in the person of Jesus Christ (Isa.53:4-6, 1Pet.2:24). God is active in all healing and wholeness by spiritual ministries, caring relationships, and the application of scientific insight (Ex.15:26, Ps.103:3-5). Jesus healed as a sign of his identity and authority, a manifestation of the Kingdom of God and an expression of God's compassion (Luke 9:37-43, 11:14-20, John 5:36).

This statement gives a concise view of The Salvation Army's view on healing as a biblical concept, with the implication that the concept of wholeness and healing has been integral to the work and ministry of The Salvation Army throughout its history.

Phil Needham (1997:25), states that "health, healing and wholeness are central concerns in the life and mission of the church...they reside in the very heart of the church." Taking the New Testament as the guide, healing and wholeness appear as central to the teachings and practices of Jesus. Fergusson (2005:55) writes "One fifth of the gospels is taken up with accounts of Jesus' healings and what followed. There are in total 25 individual healings and 16 descriptions of large group healings." Those involved in ministries of healing have drawn attention to the biblical material and its significance for their service. Thus Fergusson (2005:50) writes: "Bishop Morris Maddocks once described Christian healing as '...the difference made by Jesus when he meets us at our point of need'." Throughout the New Testament there are accounts of Jesus meeting people at their 'point of need' where he both healed and made whole: change happened. Luke chapter 5 gives two accounts of healing – of a man with leprosy and of a paralysed man. The man with leprosy was made whole and healed by a touch from Jesus after he asked Jesus to make him clean. The touch is significant, for leprosy was seen to be highly contagious and so people who had contracted the disease were shunned and cast out of society. The touch from Jesus not only restored the man physically but also restored him within society, and Jesus then sent him to the Temple, to offer the sacrifices. The next account of healing in Luke occurs immediately after this first account. The first account has the man himself asking to be healed, but in the second there is reliance on the faith of some friends. The healing offered first in this instance is forgiveness, becoming whole, and then later physical healing. "I tell you, get up, take up your mat and go home. Immediately the man did so." (Luke 5:24).

Needham (1997:46) describes several methods of Christian healing. He begins with prayer, as found in Mark 9:28-29 and James 5:13, and suggests that Christians need to strengthen their prayer life, their own reliance on God, in order to be able to be channels of God's healing power. The second method is community care, which is found in James 5:14-16, where the community of believers is instructed to gather with the elders for prayer for those who are ill. Anyone who believes in Christ as the Son of God and has faith can pray for healing and wholeness but there may be those

who have a spiritual gift of healing (1 Cor. 12:28-29). However, Needham (1997:54) also states that “in considering a congregation’s healing mission, it is therefore appropriate to ask whether or not the congregation itself is a place of health, healing and wholeness”. A report to the Church of England’s House of Bishops on the healing ministry, *A Time to Heal* (2000:233), develops this thinking by stating that “where the word of God is proclaimed and a congregation responds in confession, intercession, praise and sacrament, there is an encounter with the healing Christ”. This offers a challenge to each local Salvation Army corps. Are our corps places of wholeness, health and healing?

Any study of healing and wholeness is faced with the issue of why some people are healed and others are not. In my view there is no final answer to this question, but it may be seen to depend partly on the individual’s understanding of healing. It can be argued that healing is not the same as curing. Healing can be evident in many ways, for example spiritual or emotional, and yet the person concerned may still be physically sick. To be cured and to be healed can be seen as being different. Fergusson (2005:85) comments that “God does heal today, both naturally through the actions of health professionals and supernaturally in answer to prayer...however, God does not always cure, either immediately or in the longer term. There is not a faith formula to be found that will guarantee healing”. I have witnessed someone dying from cancer who received prayer and anointing for healing and, although they were not cured, they experienced healing both spiritually and emotionally. The person eventually died, but the last few weeks were spent healed of the emotional trauma they had carried for many years and they were also healed spiritually. They became whole, and certainly this came in conjunction with a development of personal holiness which was evident to all who had witnessed the person’s spiritual journey both within the church and the wider community.

Healing may mean that people are cured but it is more than just curing. Praying for healing and wholeness does not necessarily mean that a miraculous cure will be evident, although in some instances this may well be the case. But, through prayer, at some level a healing can take place that might enable the person to journey towards the wholeness that Christ intended. For some people, there can be a fear of prayer for healing and wholeness. If healing does not take place, and prayer is assumed to be unanswered, then a lack of faith may be supposed in the individual

being prayed for and the person praying. This is especially the case when there has been a lack of teaching and understanding that healing does not always equate to cure, that the concepts of healing and wholeness are linked. Death can also be seen as a healing. Sometimes, death is a welcome healing from the pain that the person has experienced on earth. The concept of death as a healing is one which can be very difficult to understand and talk about, but its reality does need to be acknowledged.

Dean Pallant (4th November 2006:9), in the editorial to this particular edition of the *Salvationist*, states that:

“Over the years many Salvationists have steered clear of sermons about physical healing. Few corps hold healing meetings and most of us don’t find it easy to talk about God’s healing power. Have we missed some of God’s blessings because we have been too afraid to ask?”

This is an important question, and one which needs careful consideration. Have we been too afraid to ask? The Salvation Army’s statement on the theology of healing on the Churches Together in England website states that “we therefore affirm: every Salvationist has the privilege and responsibility of involvement in health, healing and wholeness”. I would suggest that more teaching and training about wholeness and healing is needed for both officers, local officers and Salvationists alike.

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