

What About the Future of the Salvation Army?

by Samuel Logan Brengle

The future of The Salvation Army depends on both God's guidance and man's responsibility and faithfulness, and the key to its prosperity and happiness is the spirit of Jesus, which is characterized by love, humility, and selflessness.

Scripture: Isaiah 41:10, John 15:12

Topics: "Future of The Salvation Army", "Love and Unity in Service"

Description

Samuel Logan Brengle addresses the future of The Salvation Army, emphasizing that its destiny is intertwined with the faithfulness and love of its members. He acknowledges the ongoing concerns about the Army's future, urging a commitment to humility, loyalty, and adherence to Christ's teachings. Brengle warns against complacency and the loss of love, asserting that the Army's spiritual vitality depends on its members' dedication to serving one another and glorifying the cross. He concludes that the future of The Salvation Army hinges on its ability to embody love and unity, as exemplified by Jesus and the Apostle Paul.

Transcript

There are some questions always being asked and never fully answered, for the simple reason that only Omniscience knows the answer, and Omniscience is not disposed to answer questions which can be solved in measure by diligent attention to the spirit and principles revealed in the Bible, and the final answer to which is largely contingent upon our good behavior, our humility, our loyalty to truth and love, our unswerving allegiance to Jesus, and our diligence in keeping His commandments and walking in His footsteps.

I have recently been asked what I think about the future of The Salvation Army. This is an old question, about as old as The Army itself. It was going the rounds when I joined The Army over forty years ago, and some one has been asking it ever since. Both friends and foes of The Army have asked it. Officers and Soldiers whose lives and whose families have been linked up and entwined with The Army have asked it; and I doubt not our leaders have pondered over it and given it their profoundest and most anxious thought.

It is a question which those who love God and the souls of men can hardly avoid. With some it is a purely academic question. They would like to solve the question for intellectual satisfaction. Others, mere busybodies, would pry into the future, like many who are curious to know all about the affairs of their neighbors, that they may have something about which to gossip. It is not a matter of vital interest to them.

Indeed, they are of that large class of people who have no vital interest in anything. They are like the lying woman in Solomon's day who stole another woman's baby, but had so little real interest in the baby that she was willing to have it cut in two rather than to acknowledge her theft and lie.

With others it is a painfully practical question. Their hearts are in The Army. It is as dear to them as life. They are bound up in the bundle of its life. They have sacrificed every other interest for it. They are given over to it soul and body, and have dedicated not only themselves, but their children also to it. They can paraphrase the ancient Psalmist's declaration of his devotion to Jerusalem 'If I forget thee, O Salvation Army, let my right hand forget her cunning.

'If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not The Salvation Army above my chief joy.'

They feel that the highest interests of the Kingdom of God upon earth are bound up with The Army, and the coming and establishment of the Kingdom are in large measure dependent upon its spiritual life and prosperity.

There are some people who are cocksure that they know the answer. There are optimists who see nothing but the most rosy future for The Army. But there are pessimists who prophecy its imminent disruption and dissolution.

Many years ago, just after a tour that had taken me round the world, an old Officer asked me with a quizzical look: 'Are you going to leave The Army ship before she sinks?' I assured him that from a rather wide range of intimate observation I saw no signs that the ship was seriously leaking, or likely to sink, but that even if I did, as an Officer my business was to stick to the ship and do all in my power to save it, or go down with it and its precious freightage of the souls of men and women and little children. 'The hireling fleeth when he seeth the wolf coming. The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.' And the true Officer gives his life for The Army and the souls who are in its keeping.

Doubters and timid souls have been prophesying the end of The Army from its very beginning, but still it lives and prospers. But what will be its future? Will it continue to live and prosper? Or has it fulfilled its mission?

Like a great bridge hung upon two buttresses, so The Army is buttressed upon God and man.

Is it God's Army? Did He inspire and gird and guide William Booth when, with heart aching for sinful men and spirit aflame for the glory of God and the honour of Christ, he stepped out on Mile End Waste and began the work that has developed into The Salvation Army? Is God for us, or against us, or indifferent to us? I can sing for myself

His love in time past forbids me to think, He'll leave me at last in trouble to sink;

Each sweet Ebenezer I have in review Confirms His good pleasure to see me quite through.

But can I be so confident for The Army? His guidance, His overruling Providence, His gracious and mighty deliverances in the past are unmistakable, are on record, known and read of all men who care to read. He has overshadowed The Army with a pillar of cloud and fire as surely as He did ancient Israel; He has gone before and opened the 'two leaved gates of brass,' as He did for Cyrus, and empowered Army Officers and Soldiers and made them more than conquerors, as He did the Apostles and saints of the Early

Church; but do all these wonders of His favor and grace give assurance for the future? Is The Army sacrosanct? Are we favorites and pets of the Almighty? This leads us to the second point of dependence.

If God is for us, and I fully believe He is, does not that insure our future?

The future of The Army depends not only upon God -- I say it reverently and in His fear -- but also upon man, upon men, upon you and me and all who have to do with The Army. 'Hear ye me,' cried the prophet Azariah, 'Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin; The Lord is with you, while ye be with Him; and if ye seek Him, He will be found of you: but,' and here is warning for us to heed, for here lurks danger, 'but if ye forsake Him, He will forsake you.' And this is a timeless prophecy, eternally true, and not of private interpretation, as true today as it was three millenniums ago; as true of The Army, of you and of me, as it was of ancient Judah and Benjamin and their king Asa; and it is 'written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world have come.' Let us search our hearts, order our lives, and be admonished.

In so far in the past as we have sought God with our whole heart, walked in His ways, and lived and wrought in the spirit of our Lord and Master He has been with us, preserved us, prospered the work of our hands, fulfilled the desires of our hearts, and blessed us in the presence of our enemies. Can we still confidently expect His favor for the future? Yes, and only, if we continue to abide in Him and fulfill the conditions that have permitted Him to pour benedictions upon us in the past.

And what are these conditions? I think we shall find them expressed in the closing ministry of Jesus and of Paul. Of our Lord in those closing days of His ministry when preparing His disciples for His departure, and the days when they must stand alone without His incarnate presence, and lay the foundations and build the church and give it the living example and word that would guide it through storm and stress of agonizing pagan persecutions, of worldly allurements and seductions, of subtle philosophizings, of pain and poverty, of indifference and scorn, and the dangers of wealth and power and wide acclaim. Of Paul in his later ministry; his farewell address to the elders of Ephesus at Miletus, and his prison letters to the churches and his young friends and lieutenants, Timothy and Titus.

The warnings, the exhortations, the example, the close and intimate instructions of our Lord given to His disciples in the last few closing months and days and last night of His ministry, and His High Priestly prayer recorded in the seventeenth chapter of John, show us the plain path in which we must walk, if the future of The Salvation Army is to be happy and prosperous and its great promise come to ample fulfillment.

And what were the example and teachings of the Master in these fleet, closing days?

As He drew near the cross His disciples thought He was drawing near to a throne and crown, and they were each ambitious and contentious for first place and highest honors. But He told them plainly that He should be rejected of men and crucified. Then Peter rebuked Him: 'Pity Thyself -- be it far from Thee, Lord: this shall not be unto Thee.'

But He rebuked Peter and replied : ' If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.'

It was not an unusual sight in the Roman Empire to see a line of men following a leader, each bearing a cross on his way to crucifixion. This was the picture He would have them visualize. They were to follow Him, their Leader, each bearing his own cross, not seeking to save his life, but ready to lose it for His sake

and for the sake of the brethren. 'For whosoever will save his life shall lose it and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.'

So mightily at last did this teaching grip the early disciples and fire their spirits, that they actually coveted martyrdom and ran upon death with joy. In this they may have swung to an extreme, but if The Salvation Army of the future is to prosper and win spiritual triumphs, we must follow the Master, not seeking first place or power, but glorying in the cross.

This was the secret of Paul. He was the pattern disciple. He had sat at the feet of Jesus and learned of Him until he could write: 'What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ; neither count I my life dear unto myself; that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus. . . . God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.'

1. If the future of The Salvation Army is to be spiritually radiant and all conquering, we must not simply endure the cross, but glory in it. This will arrest the world, disarm Hell, and gladden the heart of our Lord.

2. We must 'by love serve one another.' We are following Him who 'came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give His life a ransom for many.' We, too, must give our lives for others, shrinking from no service, holding ourselves ever ready to wash the feet of the lowliest disciple.

3. We must still prove our discipleship by our love one for the other. It is not enough to wear the uniform, to profess loyalty to Army leaders and principles, to give our goods to feed the poor and our bodies to be burned. We must love one another. We must make this the badge of our discipleship. We must wrestle and pray and hold fast that we do not lose this.

The Army is so thoroughly organized and disciplined, so wrought into the life of nations, so fortified with valuable properties, and on such a sound financial basis, that it is not likely to perish as an organization, but it will become a spiritually dead thing if love leaks out. Love is the life of The Army. 'If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us.' But if love leaks out we shall lose our crown, we shall have a name to live and yet be dead. We may still house the homeless, dole out food to the hungry, punctiliously perform our routine work, but the mighty ministry of the Spirit will no longer be our glory. Our musicians will play meticulously, our Songsters will revel in the artistry of song that tickles the ear, but leaves the heart cold and hard. Our Officers will make broad their phylacteries and hob-nob with mayors and councilmen and be greeted in the market-place, but God will not be among us. We shall still recruit our ranks and supply our Training Garrisons with Cadets from among our own Young People, but we shall cease to be saviors of the lost sheep that have no shepherd.

If the future of The Salvation Army is to still be glorious, we must heed the exhortation: 'Let brotherly love continue.' We must remember that all we are brethren and beware lest through leakage of love we become like the wicked of whom the Psalmist wrote: 'Thou sittest and speakest against thy brother; thou slanderest thine own mother's son (Psalm I. 20), and find our hearts full of strife and bitter envying where the love that suffereth long and is kind should reign supreme.

This is that for which Jesus pleaded on that last night before His crucifixion: 'This is My commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. These things I command you, that ye love one another.'

This is that for which Paul pleaded and labored: And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another and toward all men . . . to the end He may establish your hearts unblameable in Holiness before God . . . at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ ' (1 Thessalonians iii. 12, 13).

This is that to which Peter exhorted the universal church: 'Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently; . . . And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins ' (1 Peter i. 22; iv. 8).

4. How else but by fullness of love for one another can we fulfill those supernatural requirements expressed by Paul and Peter? For more than forty years I have pondered and prayed over those two brief and searching words of Paul: 'Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love: in honour preferring one another,' 'Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.' These are lofty spiritual heights scaled only by those in whose pure hearts burns selfless love.

In so far as this spirit rules in our hearts God can work with us and bless us, and the spiritual triumphs and glory of The Army for the future are assured. But in so far as these graces of the Spirit in us fail, so far will The Army as a spiritual power in the earth fail.

Akin to these words of Paul are those of Peter: 'The elders which are among you I exhort. . . Feed the flock of God, . . . not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre (or rank or power), but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility.' Nothing will so certainly insure the prosperous and happy future of The Army as this spirit, and I am persuaded that nothing other than this can insure it. This is the life, the pulsing, eager, satisfying, and yet ever unsatisfied, outreaching, world embracing life of The Army. Organization and Government are important, vastly important, for the direction and conservation of the activities of the life; but without the life the Organization is a bit of mere mechanism and the government is a pantomime.

Finally, in closing, let me recommend to my comrades the world over, for prayerful study and meditation, Paul's farewell address to the elders of Ephesus at Miletus, recorded in Acts xx. 17-35.

Over and over again and again, through more than four decades, I have read and pondered that address, and prayed that the spirit that was in Paul might be in me and in all my comrades, for this is the spirit of Jesus. This is that for which He prayed on that last night of His agony as recorded in the seventeenth chapter of John. And this is that, and that alone, which can and will insure the victorious and happy future of our world-wide Army.

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