

Clothed in Righteousness:
A theology of Salvation Army uniform as an aid to holy living

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Abstract

Within the realms of the worldwide Christian Church The Salvation Army stands unique in the wearing of a distinctive set of clothing as a sign of membership. But is there more to the Salvation Army uniform than a visible public witness? Are there deeper, sacred associations?

This dissertation seeks to develop a theology of Salvation Army uniform. It will take into account the rediscovery of historical principles and weave them into the fabric of The Salvation Army's heritage within the Wesleyan holiness tradition.

Through the reflection of the valued use of uniform, both past and present, it will become evident that subtle changes in perception have occurred. The result may have left today's wearer with an insufficient understanding of the spiritual resources available through the uniform. This study also makes comparisons with other religious garments and highlights the doctrinal value present in the simple style of the uniform.

The Salvation Army's ongoing position of sacramental practice will also feature whereby the wearing of uniform can be understood as a means of grace.

Ultimately, grasping the truth that a saved and sanctified believer is clothed in Christ the witness of the uniform must first speak to the wearer before it can witness to the world.

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Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the dissertation has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of ‘Captain’ Elijah Cadman whose passionate desire for a uniform still has the potential to inspire holy living and mission.

Done in the strength of my Lord and Saviour.

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It is with great thanks that I convey my sincere appreciation to all those who have in so many ways participated in my learning experience at Cliff College. Each visit to the campus is a step onto holy ground.

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Above all others, my deepest gratitude and love is expressed to my wife, Jane, for her continual encouragement, help and patient support.

Introduction

From the earliest days of The Salvation Army - the movement which emerged from The Christian Mission and finds its roots in Methodism – a style of uniform clothing was proposed and adopted by new converts and members. Beginning with simple emblems and ribbons to adorn daily clothing a uniform soon developed as a means of declaring publicly that the wearers were fully devoted Christians in God’s army. Stories of public humiliation and persecution towards those who chose to don a uniform accompany the early pages of Salvation Army history. This was an age of passionate witness to the world of the transforming power of God and boldness to stand firm in the ranks of The Salvation Army. These visible soldiers were prepared to proclaim the gospel in both evangelical mission and service to those that were in need.

Within the contemporary context of The Salvation Army such stories of maltreatment because of uniform wearing are seldom heard. There remains, to a degree, a public awareness of the practical help available from a Salvationist. But what does the uniform say to the world today? Or, more fundamentally and the focus of this study, what does the uniform say to the one who wears it? Is there still value in the use of Salvation Army uniform or has it simply become a form of corporate dress?

This dissertation will seek to examine the historical purpose of the uniform and attempt to formulate a new narrative for its potential use today, encouraging the wearer to view the uniform in the light of their commitment to holiness. In short, this study aims to develop a theology for Salvation Army uniform as an aid to holy living. While it is recognised that The Salvation Army views itself as a church which does not officially practice the sacraments, viewed through the lens of the Army’s Wesleyan heritage of salvation and sanctification, and a broader understanding of sacramental theology, it will be proposed that the wearing of uniform could be understood as sacramental – or perhaps even a sacrament itself – and a means by which God’s grace can be brought to mind and received. Ultimately the wearing of the uniform needs to be framed as a witness to the self in the covenant made to holy living, thereby infusing the wearer with a holy desire to engage the world in mission.

The methodology for this study is based on research and review of available literature in regards to the historical and contemporary understanding and use of Salvation Army uniform,

a review of Wesleyan holiness theology, approaches to sacramental theology (both from a Salvationist and wider church perspective), and personal theological reflection on the possibilities of defining a deeper meaning of the uniform.

A broad sweep of this study begins with a historical outline of the early development of uniform within the emerging movement and then a view of biblical and ecclesiastical use of religious garb. What then follows is a study of the Wesleyan theological foundations within The Salvation Army, in particular an understanding of holiness and a contrast of sacramental practices. The concluding focus will be to theologially reflect on a meaning and purpose for Salvation Army uniform in light of what has been studied and to offer a new narrative for its continued use today.

A few notes on grammatical form, terminology and ecclesiological understanding: In keeping with the internal tradition of this movement, and its founding trust deeds, a capital T will be used for the definitive article of its title, thus: The Salvation Army. At times this may be shortened to simply the Army. However, when elements within the denomination are described in the possessive a lowercase t will be used, for example: the Salvation Army uniform.

A consequence of the influence of many members of the Booth family upon the formation of The Salvation Army necessitates a number of those individuals being referenced in this work. In order to differentiate them from each other their first name will also be used with their surname. The exception will be William Booth who, in deference to his position as founder, will simply be cited as Booth.

Such is the nature of The Salvation Army that many of its own ecclesiastical and organisational terms retain the form of its military metaphor. Where these terminologies are used in the first instance the more common ecclesiastical term will also be added.

It should also be pointed out that in parallel to this study there could justifiably be set an ecclesiological examination of the ontological nature of The Salvation Army. That is to say, is it a church, a Christian movement, organisation or charity, an Order within the universal Church, or some other such concept? Needless to say this cannot be dealt with here though some of its implications will surface. A number of worthy viewpoints have been published

which argue the case from various perspectives.¹ In respect to the ambivalence of thought across its history The Salvation Army will interchangeably be referred to as a church, movement and denomination. The gathered congregation is known as a corps.

To help with visual reference, an example of current Salvation Army uniform is found in Appendix A.

¹ For more in this area see: Phil Needham, *Community in Mission: A Salvationist Ecclesiology*, (London: Salvation Army, 1997); Harold Hill, *Leadership in The Salvation Army: A Case Study in Clericalisation*, (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2007); R. David Rightmire, *The Sacramental Journey of The Salvation Army: A Study of Holiness Foundations*, (Alexandria, VA: Crest Books, 2016); David Taylor, *Like a Mighty Army: The Salvation Army, the Church, and the Churches*, (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014); plus Appendix No.5 'The Salvation Army in the Body of Christ', in *The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine*, (London: Salvation Army, 2010).

The Salvation Army Uniform in Historical and Contemporary Context

When it comes to a Christian denomination that wears a uniform as a sign of their faith and membership The Salvation Army arguably stands unique. That is not to say that there are not, or have not been Christian organisations and movements who have also worn uniforms of some sort. Likewise, the wearing of significant religious clothing for certain individuals has been a part of the Christian faith since its earliest days with roots in the Levitical priestly order. This aspect will be explored in more detail.² However, the Salvation Army uniform has a distinctiveness to it which, when linked to its quasi-military metaphor, creates the capacity for the formation of a narrative regarding its history, use and purpose. One of the aims of this study is to recognise the rationale that has risen to acceptance, whether for good reason or mistakenly, and to offer a fresh perspective on the purpose and opportunity in wearing Salvation Army uniform.

Paul Fussell graciously notes that the Salvation Army uniform is ‘one of the most dignified uniforms ever worn by any “army.”’³ But why did The Salvation Army choose to advance their image and influence beyond their style of Victorian evangelical revivalism and incorporate it into the very clothes that they wore?

The Emergence of The Salvation Army

The history and first use of Salvation Army uniform needs to be framed within the context of this emerging Christian movement of the mid 19th century. In order to supply this context the briefest of histories is accounted here.

The Salvation Army started as a revivalist movement within the east end of Victorian London. Its founder, and first General (international leader), was former Methodist preacher William Booth along with the influential support of his wife, Catherine. Frustrated by the limitations of the Methodist New Connexion to allow him to fulfil his desire to be an itinerant evangelist, he parted ways with them and moved to London to engage in evangelical work

² It is noted here that there are other world faiths that also set aside particular dress on account of religious significance, such as the robes of a Buddhist monk, the hijab of a Muslim woman, or the strict dress of the Jewish Hasidim. Regrettably space does not allow further analysis in this area of interest.

³ Paul Fussell, *Uniforms: Why we are what we wear*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2002), p.67.

with the East London Christian Mission. While this separation with the Methodist tradition became permanent, the Wesleyan heritage which he grew up in and adored remained a huge influence to his life and ministry.⁴ Further influences included the new wave of holiness teaching by such figures as Phoebe Palmer and Charles Finney, along with the evangelical preaching and a call to repentant response from such evangelists as James Caughey. In these contemporaries Booth saw the spirit of John and Charles Wesley which encouraged a deeper appreciation of their theology for himself.⁵

By 1865 Booth had taken the helm of what was then called the Christian Mission, with mission stations beginning to spread across other parts of London, England and Wales. In the year 1878 a moment of inspiration, fuelled partly by the positive societal acceptances of militarism - but heralded as divine inspiration - the name of the movement changed to what it remains today: The Salvation Army.⁶ Along with this change in title came the quasi-military nomenclature and practices with Booth designated General, declaring war against the forces of evil. Sinners were called to repentance and upon witnessing to salvation were sworn-in and enrolled as soldiers (members) of The Salvation Army. They were then encouraged to live a disciplined life, growing in grace and seeking the further blessing of sanctification.

Historical Reflection on use of the Uniform

It was during the period of this change of name that the self-titled Captain Elijah Cadman gave a speech at the 1878 War Congress (Annual Conference). Here, it was reported, the first idea of a uniform is proposed by Cadman:

I would like to wear a suit of clothes that would let everyone know I meant war to the teeth and salvation for the world!⁷

⁴ Harold Hill, *Leadership in The Salvation Army: A Case Study in Clericalisation*, (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2007), pp.40-42.

⁵ Richard Collier, *The General Next to God: The Story of William Booth and The Salvation Army*, (London: Collins, 1965), p.28.

⁶ Collier, *General*, p.66.

⁷ Robert Sandall, *The History of The Salvation Army: Volume II 1878-1886*, (London: Thomas Nelson, 1950), p.43.

Up to this point the dress code for the evangelists was a black frock coat, tall hat and black tie. The black tie being insisted upon lest they be mistaken for ordained clergy wearing a white collar.⁸ The women wore plain dresses with the addition of small Quaker-type bonnets – a distinctive feature which was to prevail in female uniform dress until the 1990s.

Over the ensuing three to four years of its introduction the style of uniform developed and its availability spread throughout the ranks for both officer (minister) and soldier. It settled on the ceremonial militaristic style (albeit a simpler form than the armed forces) which is still prevalent today in formal uniform. However, even from the early days a more informal style of uniform was offered. This included red jerseys for men and women, with the name Salvation Army emblazoned in yellow. Some even personalised the jerseys adding a text to describe the owner such as ‘converted dustman.’⁹ Along with these was the simplest mark of identity for those new to the movement: a tri-colour ribbon of yellow, red and blue which was pinned to the convert’s civilian clothes.¹⁰

It is worth highlighting an important point here, particularly in regards to the jersey and ribbon. From the earliest days of The Salvation Army these material agencies were given an intentional symbolic meaning. The three colours used represented the fire of the Holy Spirit (yellow), the blood of Jesus Christ (red) and the purity, or holiness, of God (blue). The wearing of blood-red jerseys confirmed the evangelical proclamation of ‘the Blood and the Bleeding Lamb.’¹¹ An appeal to historical symbolism such as this will be made later in developing a new theological viewpoint of the uniform today.

Still, even the full uniform of the early days had a significance placed upon it as the words of Cadman attested to above. In the developing ideas of proposing a uniform it was primarily seen as a means by which people could witness an outer reality of an inner conviction. Florence Booth, wife of the second General of the Army, succinctly describes the formative reason reflecting that, ‘Just as it was to be a *Salvation* Army, so its uniform was to be a *Salvation* uniform.’¹² Florence Booth is not suggesting in this that there is a salvific efficacy in wearing the uniform, but she does present, from a founding era, the notion that there is

⁸ Sandall, *History: Volume II*, p.42.

⁹ Catherine Bramwell-Booth, *Catherine Booth*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1970), p.274.

¹⁰ Those same primary colours are used in the flags of The Salvation Army.

¹¹ Robert Sandall, *The History of The Salvation Army: Volume I 1865-1878*, (London: Thomas Nelson, 1947), p.60.

¹² Florence Booth, *The Army Uniform*, (St Albans: Campfield Press, 1927), p.2.

more to the Salvation Army uniform than simply its material form. At its very least it has symbolic value.

However, Rightmire highlights a somewhat pessimistic view surrounding the introduction of uniforms suggesting that it signified the ‘beginning of the institutionalisation of the movement’, also noting that the early Army enjoyed a ‘flair for the dramatic’ and the offer of advancement to a class of people as reason for the introduction of the clothing.¹³

Railton, one of the founder’s most significant and influential aides, would have agreed with Rightmire regarding the visual appeal of uniform to attract attention. But he also saw the benefit of wearing uniform as a means by which one’s own spiritual life could be kept in order. ‘The value of the uniform, both as a means of attracting attention and of acting as a check upon the conduct of those who wear it, is beyond all calculation.’¹⁴

Meanwhile, critics of the era – notably those from a High Church tradition – regarded the more dramatic elements of Salvationism, its music, open air preaching and indeed uniforms, as a form of ‘dressed up religion in a clown’s costume.’¹⁵

But it is Bramwell Booth, son of the founder and successor as international leader, who raises the level of perception beyond mere material properties. Reflecting on the early years of The Salvation Army Bramwell Booth records that the uniform was far more than purely a form of clothing to distinguish membership in a particular organisation and much more than ‘a badge of office or rank.’ For Bramwell Booth, and his officers and soldiers at the time, the uniform represented ‘the great principles for which we were contending and that it was rich in many sacred associations for those who wore it.’¹⁶

While Bramwell Booth does not outline what those sacred associations were, inference can be taken that from the start the Salvation Army uniform was to be rightly understood as having significant spiritual merit.

¹³ R. David Rightmire, *Sacraments and the Salvation Army: Pneumatological Foundations*, (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1990), p.77.

¹⁴ George S. Railton, *Heathen England*, (London: Salvation Army, 1889), p.33.

¹⁵ R.G. Moyles, *Come Join Our Army: Historic Reflections on Salvation Army Growth*, (Alexandria, VA: Crest Books, 2007), p.89.

¹⁶ Bramwell Booth, *Echoes and Memories*, (London: Salvation Army, 1925), p.215.

Contemporary Reflection on the use of Uniform

As The Salvation Army has marched through history it has seen some subtle, though significant, changes in the viewpoint of uniform. Contemporary writers still hold value in the wearing of a distinctive set of clothing. However, some of their emphases have a variance in them that, while echoing partial former thoughts, brings to primary significance aspects which may have previously been secondary. Three such writers are Krommenhoek, Ryan and Needham.

For Krommenhoek, the power that is held within the Salvation Army uniform is its ability to be a tool for ‘confessing Christ worldwide and communicating our holiness tradition. It separates the wearer from the world and communicates that she or he belongs to God and is dedicated to the purpose of inviting others to travel the same road.’¹⁷ In other words it is a witnessing tool, marking out the wearer as a person of faith whose mission is to bring others to faith.

It is helpful that in this statement Krommenhoek highlights the holiness tradition in which the Army stands. However, while an interpretation of holiness is to be set apart there seems little value to engage in mission if one is separate ‘from’ the world. That said, a conclusion of this study will bring to light the need to be holy *in* the world while participating in the benefits of uniform wearing.

A number of years ago Salvation Army officer Geoff Ryan caused a mild stir amongst some progressive Salvationist circles by stating that he believed he would one day stand before the Lord in his Army uniform.¹⁸ While he would later clarify that his point was allegorical the sentiment and ensuing discussion gave opportunity to explore the principle and practice of uniform wearing.

¹⁷ Vibeke Krommenhoek, *A Sacramental Army: A Salvationist View of Sacramental Living in a Nordic Context*, (Helsinki: Salvation Army, 2011), p.47.

¹⁸ Geoff Ryan, *10 on The Army: Re-Imagining The Salvation Army for the 21st Century*, (Canada: Rubicon Books, 2007), p.31.

For Ryan it is a leaning towards the principle of uniform wearing that he emphasises rather than a staunch claim to preserve the traditional appearance of the suit. In order to back this up he quotes General John Larsson, promoting The Salvation Army as a ‘visible force’.

We are a gloriously visible part of the Body of Christ. We even witness by what we wear. It is the principle rather than any particular style of uniform that is important. Many young Salvationists of today, even in their informality, are showing their grasp of the principle. The principle of visibility needs every encouragement.¹⁹

Ryan helps to place context for such thinking in reminding the reader that Larsson had recently overseen The Salvation Army in Sweden where the adoption of T-shirts, sweatshirts and other logo emblazoned casual wear were seen as official uniform on par with more traditional styles.

But is the Salvation Army uniform merely about visibility? When examining the physical properties of the uniform are there aspects of the style that would need to remain to make its theology work? This question will be answered later by exploring the potential for deeper meaning in one aspect of the formal uniform: the ‘S’s on the collar.

Perhaps the closest to any contemporary theological reflection on the uniform is Needham’s short reference to it in his book on Salvationist ecclesiology.

It is a symbol of the transformation which conversion effects and the disciplined life to which all Christians are called. It represents the change wrought, the re-clothing in Christ, and the call to battle against principalities and powers.²⁰

Certainly there are notes in Needham’s description which this study is developing, that is to say the uniform reminds the wearer of the saving work of grace, but also an acknowledgement that a deeper and further call of faith is possible.

Notwithstanding the writings of a select group of mostly officers, personal experience highlights the common held view amongst Salvationists today, as stated earlier and reinforced by Larsson, that the uniform is primarily a witness to the world. That is to say a

¹⁹ John Larsson quoted in, Ryan, *10 on the Army*, p.37.

²⁰ Phil Needham, *Community in Mission: A Salvationist Ecclesiology*, (London: Salvation Army, 1997), p.120.

witness at least to those who recognise it as the uniform of The Salvation Army. Whether the viewer perceives a Christian or a charity worker is debatable and dependent on the prevalence of The Salvation Army in towns and cities around the world. It is not the aim of this study to analyse public perception, accurate or otherwise, of the significance of the Army uniform. Rather, the focus must concentrate on the development of a theological understanding of the uniform by those who wear it.

How then has the shift occurred in the Army's own perception of its clothing once so full of 'sacred associations'? One way to trace this is through the official conventions of practice in all matters of Salvationism: the Orders and Regulations.

Salvation Army Orders & Regulations

Why is it that the uniform today is viewed through the narrow lens of only a witness to others and indeed, if personal experience is correct, worn at times with reluctance by some and not at all by others? Perhaps one reason may be a limited emphasis at an official and organisational level on the spiritual benefits of wearing uniform. A case in point would be the comparisons of official Orders and Regulations from two different eras. The 1917 edition gives four pages to the value and practice of wearing Salvation Army uniform, citing the advantages of such as not only a witness, but also:

- A confession of their salvation
- An open declaration that the wearer has given up wrong-doing.
- It delivers the wearer from temptation.
- It makes opportunities for usefulness.
- Makes for an occasion for talking about God.
- Draws attention to the Army.
- It is an exercise in self-denial in 'taking up the cross daily.'
- It is a preacher itself.²¹

This last point makes an interesting statement that the material value itself declares salvation. The same sentiment is picked up during this era by Florence Booth who suggests that the uniform has a 'voice' which, in a silent gesture reminiscent of Saint Francis, was able to

²¹ Salvation Army, *Orders and Regulations for Field Officers*, (London: Salvation Army, 1917), pp.205-206.

‘preach as I walk.’²² And so the orders and regulations go on to say, ‘If it is right to proclaim salvation with the tongue...it must be right to do so by the clothes.’²³ There is evidence here that an early understanding of uniform sees the potential for these clothes to signify something beyond itself. This latent theology in the uniform speaks of a spiritual ability to proclaim salvation to all and be a personal sign of both saving and keeping faith.

Meanwhile, the most current edition of orders and regulations for soldiers (albeit published 30 years ago) has reduced the information pertaining to uniform to less than one page with the following points of use highlighted:

- It singles out its wearer as a professing Christian.
- It is an invitation to the people [public] to avail themselves of help.
- It helps the wearer to remember to walk worthy.
- It is a protection in surroundings where one might otherwise be molested.
- It creates an immediate feeling of comradeship.
- It opens the way for the soldier to act as the representative of the Army.²⁴

While this latest order does highlight the ability of the uniform to remind the Salvationist to ‘walk worthy’, it seems to lack the earlier conviction that the same uniform can actually deliver from temptation. Even while there are other similarities between the two lists – again in particular the viewing of uniform as witness – a subtle shift has occurred in placing more emphasis on how the uniform can be viewed as helpful for others rather than a spiritual discipline and agent for transformation of the self.

Further to this, the latest resource, published in 2014, for the teaching of new recruits in preparing them for membership as soldiers presents an even greater reduction in definition, limiting the use of uniform to just three points:

- A commitment in the war against evil.
- A personal testimony to the wearer’s own Christian faith and practice.
- It signifies the availability of the Salvationist to anyone needing a helping hand and listening ear.²⁵

²² Booth, Florence, *Uniform*, p.7.

²³ Salvation Army, *Orders* (1917), p.206.

²⁴ Salvation Army, *Chosen to be a Soldier: Orders and Regulations for Soldiers of The Salvation Army*, (London: Salvation Army, 1987), p.75.

There is an unfortunate irony in that this teaching resource concludes the section by stating, ‘Not all Salvation Army members wear a uniform. It is a personal choice to do so, *but the reason for wearing it remains unchanged.*’²⁶ (Italics added.)

Gone is the uniform’s potential for a means of proclaiming salvation. Gone is the resource for deliverance from temptation and the reminder to daily take up the cross by the means of uniform wearing. What only remains is, again, the defined purpose of the uniform as a means of personal testimony or witness.

Finally, the definitive ecclesiological statement regarding the nature of The Salvation Army in the Body of Christ, written in 2008, briefly mentions the wearing of uniform amongst the distinctive characteristics of this movement. It states that uniforms are, ‘a witness to belonging to Christ and a signal of availability to others.’²⁷

What has been shown is that changes in the approach to Salvation Army uniform have occurred through its history. What needs to be understood now is whether there remains value in the continued use of uniform. If there is significance to be found beyond merely a means of public recognition then it needs to be grounded in a theological standpoint that begins with a witness to the self before witnessing to the world; a personal recognition that there lies within the uniform a sacred association with salvation and holiness.

²⁵ Salvation Army, *To Serve: Inspiring a New Generation of Salvation Army Soldiers (Leader’s Handbook)*, (London: Salvation Army, 2014), p.137.

²⁶ Salvation Army, *To Serve*, p.137.

²⁷ Salvation Army, *The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine*, (London: Salvation Army, 2010), p.314.

Religious Garments and Clergy Robes

In order to help define a standpoint in relation to any theological or doctrinal applications of religious clothing, a view is first taken of the purposes of religious clothing from both a biblical and ecclesiastical perspective. By examining the reasons for wearing the priestly garments of biblical history and the robes worn by clergy today, comparisons can be made with each tradition in relation to wearing Salvation Army uniform.

The Priestly Garments of Aaron

The wearing of some form of distinctive clothing for the purposes of ministry and as a symbol of holiness can be traced back to the creation of the priestly robes and garments within the Levitical line. Exodus 28 gives a detailed account of the various elements which made up these impressive vestments: the breastpiece, ephod, robe, tunic, turban and sash. While Cole notes that ‘no special liturgical significance is given to the individual pieces’, the text names the vestments as a whole as being ‘consecrated’ and ‘sacred’ (Exodus 28:2-3).²⁸ Recognition of this status can be glimpsed in Psalm 132, a psalm traditionally associated with pilgrims making their way to the Temple in Jerusalem, where the worshippers recite, ‘May your priests be clothed with righteousness.’ (Psalm 132:9)

Meanwhile, Leviticus 8 recounts the elaborate proceedings of the ordination into priesthood of Aaron by the hands of Moses. While much of the chapter works through the details of sacrificial offerings and the shedding of blood to make atonement, it begins with a ritual of washing before being clothed in the holy vestments of tunic and robe.

Then Moses brought Aaron and his sons forward, and washed them with water. He put the tunic on him, fastened the sash around him, clothed him with the robe, and put the ephod on him. (Leviticus 8:6-7)

While this ritual washing could not be named as baptism there are allusions towards sacramental thinking in this way. Macquarrie notes the ancient, purificatory symbolism of using water in ritualistic ways throughout Judaic and other pre-Christian religious practices.

²⁸ R. Alan Cole, *Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary*, (Nottingham: IVP, 1973), p.207.

Water is so closely connected with human life that it could hardly fail to find a place among those things which were seen not as mere things but as signs, symbols, even sacraments, surrounded by a host of connotations and associations.²⁹

What is significant is that the washing marks the beginning process of consecration – ‘the outward washing with water signified an inward cleansing of the soul.’³⁰ The second step of the Mosaic priestly practice led to the donning of clothes infused with spiritual significance.

This concept has implications for the argument of this study. Within the practices of The Salvation Army an individual is welcomed into the life of the church not by baptismal means in the traditional sense of using water, rather through a swearing-in ceremony and the wearing of a tunic – the Salvation Army uniform. The sacramental nature of this ceremony will be explored later.

Priestly Robes in the Church of England

Certainly the tradition of priests wearing particular sets of clothing is evidenced across the whole of Scripture and remains in use within churches today – most notably (but not exclusively) the Catholic, Anglican and Orthodox traditions. Taking just one of those streams of faith – the Church of England – comparisons and contrasts can be made between religious vestments and Salvation Army uniform.

Within the history of the Church of England there has been a keen concern that ministers are dressed correctly and appropriately in the fulfilment of the duties of their office. As far back as the canons of 1604 legislation was enacted for the prescription of what to wear both inside and outside of church ministry.³¹

While much of the archaic language, form and regulation of the older canons of the Anglican Church have subsequently been updated, there still remains the requirement to follow Canon C27 (‘Of the dress of ministers’) which states:

²⁹ John Macquarrie, *A Guide to the Sacraments*, (London: SCM Press, 1997), pp.56-57.

³⁰ Macquarrie, *Sacraments*, p.57.

³¹ Andrew Atherstone, *Clergy Robes and Mission Priorities*, (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2008), p.4.

The apparel of a bishop, priest, or deacon shall be suitable to his office; and, save for purposes of recreation and other justifiable reasons, shall be such as to be *a sign and mark of his holy calling* and ministry as well to others as to those committed to his spiritual charge.³² (Italics added)

To some degree the language used here of the significance placed on clerical apparel can similarly be translated into the Salvationist approach towards the uniform being a witness to the world. For the Anglican priest, the clothing prescribed to him or her is to be such that when viewed by others, both within and without of the church's immediate responsibility, there is an assumed attitude as to the manner and nature of the one wearing such clothing. To a certain extent ministers such as those within the Anglican tradition may still have the advantage of a general popular understanding of what a typical priest wears, therefore singling them out as a person of faith. However, it would be fair to suggest that the ability of an individual to recognise the role of a priest by what is worn does not necessarily progress to the understanding that the clothing is also a sign and mark of holy calling. Contemporary society still includes many jobs which are marked out by uniforms with the purpose of highlighting their distinctive role. For the priest, however, canon laws such as those above speak of a deeper understanding, reason and purpose behind the wearing of their "uniform." The vesture draws its significance from beyond their wearers, their superiors or even the establishment. It lies directly with the calling of God.

Again, there is much to compare here with similarities in Salvation Army uniform. It is worn as a sign of one who is marked out as a follower of Christ and can publicly declare a particular role of the one who wears it. However, of huge significance is the fact that the uniform is worn not just by those who find themselves in full time ministry as officers, but also is greatly encouraged to be worn by the laity too. Salvation Army uniform is for both officer and soldier alike.

If the purpose of this study is to attempt to formulate a theological understanding of Salvation Army uniform and, indeed, to take it one step further and suggest that it can hold its own theology, this may be where some similarities between Salvationist and Anglican practices would part. For a further canon law on the Church of England's statutes highlights that

³² Archbishop's Council, *The Canons of the Church of England*, Seventh Edition, (London: Church House Publishing, 2012), p.114.

clerical vesture has ‘no doctrinal significance.’³³ Some have argued that this gives justification for the dispensing of any clerical garb while others have retorted that such a canon does not reject the understanding of the same clothing has having ‘substantial importance.’³⁴

All that said, it must be recognised that viewing clergy robes as having no doctrinal significance does not necessarily mean that they cannot be viewed without any theological significance. While there are similarities between theology and doctrine they are not simply synonymous with each other. At its broadest sense theology is the study of God and his relation to the world through various means. Meanwhile, doctrine may be understood as the communally agreed position or teaching of a particular church tradition, albeit one which may be shared in a similar vein with others. So while clergy robes may not provide a means for teaching the doctrine of a church, they may be used to reflect an understanding of God’s characteristics and qualities. Salvation Army uniform, on the other hand, will be shown to hold an ability for reinforcing doctrinal positions and embracing theological significance.

Despite the stated regulation within the Anglican tradition, Atherstone’s critique of clergy robes challenges the need for such religious clothing in light of the growing ecumenical scene: ‘Why still insist that Anglicans mark themselves out from their Nonconformist neighbours by what they wear to church on Sundays?’³⁵ Such an idea would appear to be in stark contrast to the view held by The Salvation Army.

So it would seem that even from a surface level there are similar religious connotations between uniform and biblical and ecclesiastical priestly garb. Any differences there may be reside in the fact that the uniform is not restricted to those in clerical leadership, but available to all who choose to wear it and benefit from its doctrinal and theological associations.

³³ Archbishop’s Council, *Canons*, p.24.

³⁴ Atherstone, *Clergy Robes*, p.12.

³⁵ Atherstone, *Clergy Robes*, p.16.

Holiness Theology and the Salvation Army Uniform

If there is to be any examination of the uniform from a doctrinal or theological point of view then it must be grounded in the wider established teaching of The Salvation Army: the foundational emphasis on holiness expressed by Wesley and later affirmed by Booth.

When Wesley spoke of holiness he often used the phrase Christian Perfection, though his lesser used title of Perfect Love is perhaps a more helpful way to draw near to the doctrine. In his seminal book on the subject, Wesley points out that the doctrine is not meant to be understood in terms of an angelic perfection or one experienced by Adam before the fall. Neither is it the inability of being subject to mistake or temptation, nor freedom from infirmities.

Rather, Wesley describes Christian perfection by its result. First, that a believer is sanctified, that is to say, ‘renewed in the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness.’³⁶ Secondly, that the sanctifying event saves them from all sin. The implications of being perfected in Christ brings about ‘the humble, gentle, patient love of God and our neighbour, ruling our tempers, words, and actions.’³⁷

Rooted in the rich heritage of the Wesleyan tradition and evident in the developing history of The Salvation Army while it was still known as The Christian Mission, Booth makes a clear statement on the teaching application of God’s saving grace unto holiness.

Holiness to the Lord is to us a fundamental truth; it stands to the forefront of our doctrines. We write it on our banners. It is in no shape or form an open debateable question as to whether God can sanctify wholly, whether Jesus does save his people *from* their sins. In the estimation of The Christian Mission [Salvation Army] that is settled for ever, and any evangelist who did not hold and proclaim the ability of Jesus Christ to save his people to the uttermost from sin and sinning I should consider out of place amongst us.³⁸

Booth’s vigorous statement echoes the pneumatological foundation of Wesley’s account of entire sanctification. The central core of Wesley’s doctrine of holiness draws out the

³⁶ John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, (London: Epworth Press, 1952), p.33.

³⁷ Wesley, *Plain Account*, p.112.

³⁸ Sandall, *History: Volume I*, p.209.

possibility for the life of the believer to be so filled with the perfecting love of God that the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit invigorates the Christian to live in the fullness of who they were created to be. The result is holy living. It is not merely a spiritualised deepening love for God, but the practical reality of also fully loving the neighbour.

This doctrine was, and still is, held in contention by some and causes deep divide for its insistence that the work of grace wrought in a Christian was not only to be experienced in a progressive work of holiness, but could also be experienced in the fullness of being wholly sanctified in an instant.³⁹ Booth, it would seem, saw beyond any potential controversy and grasped such teaching as vital and fundamental to the existence of The Salvation Army. He brought this doctrine – which he first encountered in the Methodist New Connexion – and confirmed it as authoritative within the doctrines of The Christian Mission.⁴⁰ From its founding to the present day The Salvation Army doctrinally states:

We believe that it is the privilege of all believers to be wholly sanctified, and that their whole spirit and soul and body may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁴¹

When this doctrine is placed alongside its companion doctrine of justification by grace through faith the result is the experience of full salvation – saved to the uttermost from sin and sinning.⁴² So enshrined is this belief that it was reflected in the early history of the Army by proclaiming its motto as Blood and Fire. That is, the blood of Jesus Christ which brings forgiveness of sins and salvation, and the fire of the Holy Spirit which makes possible the experience of sanctification. ‘Thus the expression reflects the original emphases of The Salvation Army as a salvation and Holiness Movement.’⁴³

This motto remains permanently emblazoned upon such symbolic devices as The Salvation Army flag and crest. Salvationist songs also contain methods of reinforcing this doctrine,

³⁹ Jason E. Vickers, *Wesley: A Guide for the Perplexed*, (London: T&T Clark, 2009), p.102.

⁴⁰ For a full comparison of the similarities in the statements of faith between the Methodist New Connexion and The Salvation Army see: Salvation Army, *Handbook* (2010), p.282-283.

⁴¹ Salvation Army, *Handbook*, (2010), p.191.

⁴² It is worth noting that where Salvationist doctrine treats justification and sanctification as two separate statements of faith, the New Connexion doctrines mentioned above place both emphases into one article: ‘We believe that justification is by grace, through faith, and that he that believeth hath the witness in himself: and that it is our privilege to be fully sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the spirit of God.’

⁴³ John G. Merritt (ed), *Historical Dictionary of The Salvation Army*, (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2006), p.25.

much like the hymns of early Methodism. In a peculiarly Salvationist style a song is used as a means to explain one of its symbols – the flag – and repeats in its refrain, ‘Lift up the Army banner, blood and fire, lift it higher, for it tells of full salvation.’⁴⁴

It is in the understanding that The Salvation Army uses symbols and signs to emphasise its doctrinal stance, in this instance salvation to the uttermost through justification and sanctification, that we turn again to the uniform. Are there resources within its simple style that may prove helpful to the wearer in reminding them of this foundational doctrine? Rightmire suggests that, ‘As a visible sign of *salvation and holiness*, the uniform embodies the principles of The Salvation Army.’⁴⁵ (Italics added) The mechanism by which this study proposes an aide memoire to those principles is through stressing the importance of the ‘S’s on the collar of the uniform.

‘S’s on the Collar

While some elements of the uniform have changed over the years – the long dresses and bonnets, the frock coats and crimson sweaters - the tunic itself has changed very little and remains plain in style with little in the way of adornments. While earlier models may have boasted some modest form of braiding on the sleeves and perhaps stripes to signify rank, now formal uniform consists of simple epaulettes of rank on the shoulder and a small, single ‘S’ on each collar – around 3cm and mounted on a coloured cloth hexagon, again to denote rank or to differentiate between soldier and officer. (See Appendix A for detail). In the early days of the uniform these ‘S’s were brass and now are more usually metallic silver.

The purpose and symbolism of these ‘S’s are worthy of study here as they have the potential of providing a visual reminder of the life to which a Salvationist is called. However, for such a small item they also have the potential for misunderstanding outside of the movement and various interpretations from within.

Personal experience has proved that the uniform has caused several instances of mistaken identity in various contexts, all owing to this simple insignia on the collar. These confusions

⁴⁴ Salvation Army, *The Songbook of The Salvation Army*, (London: Salvation Army, 2015), Song No.993, p.341.

⁴⁵ Rightmire, *Sacramental Journey*, p.142

range from being identified as a potential airline pilot for Swiss Air, to a security guard, to a manager at Sainsbury's. Another occasion caused a bemused family to wonder if the uniform and 'S's signified a visit from Social Services.

Salvation Army history in the Congo even records the unfortunate events of ecclesiastical mistaken identity of the 'S's as somehow being attributed to the outlawed new religious movement of Simon Kimbangu!⁴⁶

What then do these letters stand for which have been affixed to every official uniform since it was formalised in 1882?

The most common held response, and one that has prevailed for many decades, is that the 'S's, one on each collar, stand for 'Saved to Serve'. Such a statement resonates well with the ethos and mission of The Salvation Army which places great value in its commitment and dedication to serve others as a reflection of their faith experience. Indeed this sentiment has to some degree been reinforced by the alliterative words of a former General, John Gowans. His poetic, pithy mission statement for The Salvation Army and its *raison d'être* was to 'Save Souls, Grow Saints and Serve Suffering humanity.'⁴⁷

Meanwhile, in a bid to re-energize evangelical fervour, there have been those who have protested the designation that a Salvationist is saved to serve and instead attempt to claim an earlier motive for the inclusion of the uniform 'S's citing that they stand for 'Saved to Save.'⁴⁸ Again this is a legitimate ideal of the movement and certainly encapsulates the early zeal of Salvationists whose primary focus was to rescue the lost from an impending eternity of doom and promote the availability of salvation through Christ witnessed in their own experience of salvation received. Similar to the previous meaning, there is much to merit this claim which is highlighted in the words of covenant made by each Salvation Army officer to 'live to win souls and make their salvation the first purpose of my life.'⁴⁹ Likewise for soldiers they promise that they will 'share the good news of Jesus Christ, endeavouring to win others to him.'⁵⁰

⁴⁶ John Coutts, *The Salvationists*, (London: Mowbrays, 1977), p.130.

⁴⁷ Salvation Army, *To Serve*, p.49.

⁴⁸ Salvation Army, *Chosen to be a Soldier*, p.76.

⁴⁹ Salvation Army, *Handbook*, (2010), p.322.

⁵⁰ Salvation Army, *Handbook*, (2010), p.321.

However, while both of these claims to the meaning behind the ‘S’ on the uniform hold much value and truth, no historical evidence exists that proves either were the intention of the original uniform design nor any subsequent changes since. A thorough search of Salvation Army archives including the earliest of documents that formulated and confirmed doctrine, missional practice, aesthetics, symbolism, and orders and regulations has not been able to give official credence to either statement. Granted, those same documents do not refute any notion that the ‘S’s on the collar of uniforms do not refer to either ‘Saved to Serve’ or ‘Saved to Save’, but there seems to be no explicit directive that this is the purpose of them being included on the uniform. This is highlighted all the more because other areas of symbolism within The Salvation Army are plainly explained in many places such as the use of military terminology for activities, buildings or leadership positions, and the meanings behind the Salvation Army salute, flag and crest. This latter symbol will be explained in more detail below and may hold the best clue as to why the ‘S’s are used.

A possible reason why the term ‘Saved to Serve’ may have risen to such prominence may be in large part to the formation of a uniformed youth movement within the Army known as the Life Saving Guards. This Salvationist girls’ group, run on a similar model to Baden Powell’s Scouting movement, included on the uniform their insignia and motto “To Save and to Serve.” It is my conjecture that the popularity of this motto eventually became attributed and attached to the uniform of soldiers and officers. Of course it could be argued that the term was in common parlance before the formation of this youth movement and the Life Saving Guards simply adopted it. However, there seems no recorded evidence to back this up. Later thought may have developed the apocryphal narrative that the original meaning of the ‘S’s should have been to emphasise that the uniform wearer was saved in order to save others.⁵¹

The potential explanation for why the ‘S’s are present on the uniform – and once highlighted seems the most plausible for obvious reasons – can be found in the description of another symbol of The Salvation Army: the Crest.

⁵¹ Soteriologically speaking there is much that could be discussed further on this subject, if space allowed, reflecting on the fact that salvation is completely the work of God in Christ and not by human means. Neither a person, nor a Christian church can save a soul. The same principle could also be applied to the earlier quote from Gowans stating the purpose of The Salvation Army is to save souls.

While many around the world may be familiar with the red shield logo of The Salvation Army, the original ecclesiastical symbol used from the founding of the movement is the Crest which adorns the walls of all Salvation Army halls (places of worship). (See Appendix B for examples of Salvation Army symbols).

The official description of this symbol breaks down the constituent elements of the crest thus:

The crest is a combination of symbols, no fewer than seven, and represents the leading doctrines of the Army:

- (a) The round figure – the sun – represents the light and fire of the Holy Spirit.
- (b) The cross in the centre represents the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- (c) The letter ‘S’ stands for salvation.
- (d) The swords represent the warfare of salvation.
- (e) The shots represent the truths of the gospel.
- (f) The crown represents the crown of glory which God will give to all His soldiers who are faithful to the end.
- (g) The motto ‘Blood and Fire’.⁵²

Along with the clear indication that the ‘S’ (in the crest at least) stands for ‘Salvation’, two other points are worth noting. The first is the ambiguity attached to (e) in so much as not defining what consists of the ‘truths of the gospel’ signified by the seven shots at the bottom of the crest. By not clearly expressing this point in the first instance, like the ‘S’s on the uniform collar, this has led to speculation and suggestion over the years in a search for a definitive meaning that perhaps was never intended.⁵³ The second point is to reiterate that the motto ‘Blood and Fire’ speaks of the blood of Jesus Christ which leads to saving grace and the fire of the Holy Spirit which brings about sanctifying grace.

Again, based on assumptions drawn from the crest, it should be stated that while ‘S’ for Salvation seems the most logical reason for its inclusion on the uniform, research for this study has shown that there is no official historical evidence to confirm this. What this means is that the ‘S’s on the collar are left open to further interpretation.

⁵² Salvation Army, *Chosen to be a Soldier*, p.24-25.

⁵³ Some have laid out a systematic path to salvation based on seven verses of Scripture. Others have stated that the seven ‘gospel shots’ relate to the seven ‘I am’ statements of Christ. Meanwhile, most are unaware that earlier copies of the Crest included nine ‘shots’. Could they simply be an artistic device for aesthetic balance?

Therefore, it is the proposition of this study that in light of the Army's rich heritage of the Wesleyan understanding of salvation to the uttermost the soldier will want to declare and be reminded by means of their uniform that they are 'Saved and Sanctified.'

The Sacramental Opportunities of Salvation Army Uniform

So it would seem then that the simple addition of the ‘S’s on a uniform can be understood as having doctrinal significance. They help to remind the wearer of Salvationist teaching on the experience and need to live in full salvation – saved and sanctified. What then of the overall approach to the uniform? In what sense does the uniform itself present a theological understanding of sacramental grace? And can it find its equivalence within a traditional acceptance of the sacraments?

There are a number of elements within The Salvation Army which set it apart from most other mainline Christian denominations, the uniform being just one example. Of perhaps more significance ecclesiologically is the Army’s approach to the sacraments - in particular the practice of baptism and communion. Regrettably, due in large part to non-observance and possibly lack of clear and frequent teaching, the Salvationist approach to the sacraments is often misunderstood both within and without of the ranks. So, by way of introduction for this section, an outline is offered in regards to The Salvation Army’s position on the important theology of the sacraments.

A Salvationist Theology of the Sacraments

It must be stressed from the first that the Salvation Army is not anti-sacraments. Former General of The Salvation Army, Shaw Clifton, has previously written that ‘sacramental ceremonies or rituals are not to be scorned’ and that ‘though we may regard the rituals as dispensable, the grace sought therein is not.’⁵⁴ Indeed, it formally recognises ‘the positive experience in Christ’ which is found in such acts.⁵⁵ The various forms of sacramental ritual expressed in other denominations are to be respected and not criticized. Indeed, there is no order or regulation given to Salvationists that forbids them from partaking in such ceremonies as Holy Communion where the host church would welcome the believer to the table.⁵⁶ They are simply viewed as not essential to saving grace and therefore not celebrated in any worship services. While this was not originally the case in the formative years of the Movement, a

⁵⁴ Shaw Clifton, *Who are these Salvationists?*, (Alexandria, VA: Crest Books), p.63-64.

⁵⁵ Robert Street, *In the Master’s Hands: Each Life Sacramental*, (London: Salvation Army, 2016), p.6.

⁵⁶ Indeed, to the surprise of this author, research could find no order or regulation which forbids the administration of sacraments. They simply are not practiced in Salvation Army worship.

decision to withdraw from these aspects of common Christian practice soon came into effect – originally for the pragmatic reasons of a movement whose primary focus was evangelism with a theological reasoning added in later years.⁵⁷

Part of that theological reflection is placed on the etymological understanding of the word sacrament, citing that the word is not found within scripture.⁵⁸ That in itself is not a sufficient argument as there is much in the ecclesiological and theological lexicon which is also not found in Scripture. However, the opinion goes on to draw attention to the fact that the Latin word *sacramentum* is a translation in the Vulgate of the Greek word *mysterion*, a word solely used by Paul in Colossians to describe Christ (1:27 & 2:2).⁵⁹ From this perspective The Salvation Army agrees with theologians such as Karl Barth and Edward Schillebeeckx that Christ is the true (primal) Sacrament of God.⁶⁰ The Salvationist is pointed towards ‘the privilege and necessity of seeking the substance rather than the shadow.’⁶¹

It is perhaps a quirk of history that another original meaning for the root word sacrament was the name given to the oath of a Roman soldier being enrolled into the service of the Emperor. Davison notes that along with the oath soldiers were also often marked with a tattoo, hence Augustine made a play on this, likening the sign of the cross in baptism to the soldier’s tattoo.⁶² It would be debatable as to how far this concept could be pushed in the light of the covenant which the Salvation Army soldier makes at their enrolment. Could the mark placed upon them come in the outward appearance of a uniform?

Baptism and the Salvation Army Uniform

In regards to baptism, The Salvation Army acknowledges Christ’s commission to make disciples – baptising them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit – and formally states that:

⁵⁷ William H. Nelson, *Blood and Fire: General William Booth*, (New York: Century, 1929), p.168-171.

⁵⁸ Robert Street, *Called to be God’s People*, (London: Salvation Army, 1999), p.92.

⁵⁹ Macquarrie argues that the Greek word *mysterion* has the potential to be quite misleading and is ‘perhaps too vague to be of much help in understanding ‘sacrament’ in its Christian sense.’ John Macquarrie, *A Guide to the Sacraments*, (London: SCM Press, 1997), p.5.

⁶⁰ Street, *Called to be God’s People*, p.93.

⁶¹ Minnie Carpenter, *Salvationists and the Sacraments*, (London: Salvation Army, 1945), p.5.

⁶² Andrew Davison, *Why Sacraments?*, (London: SPCK, 2013), p.5.

We believe that soldiership is discipleship and the public swearing-in of a soldier of The Salvation Army beneath the Trinitarian flag fulfils this command. It is a public response and witness to the life-changing encounter with Christ which has already taken place, as is the believer's water baptism practised by some other Christians.⁶³

The swearing-in, or enrolment, ceremony of a believer making a commitment to God through The Salvation Army is always both a joyous and solemn occasion. There are without doubt similarities between this ceremony within the Army and the baptismal welcome into a church. Both recognise the work of grace in the life of the believer, acknowledge the commitment made in faith to God, and, by public declaration, confirm their membership in the congregation. Similar to any Christian denomination who do not regard water baptism as efficacious for spiritual regeneration, The Salvation Army holds that the swearing-in ceremony is 'essentially a witness to the life changing encounter with Christ which has already happened. The ceremony itself is not the encounter and should not be confused with the act of becoming a Christian.'⁶⁴

That said, an obvious critique of this stance would be that while the swearing-in ceremony and the ritual of baptism have similar ends the means by which this is done comes through very different forms of symbolism. One through the receiving of promises made plus the simple means of offering 'the right hand of fellowship'⁶⁵ (Galatians 2:9) and the other by symbolic application of the cleansing waters of baptism. While Salvationist theology sees no need for the purifying metaphor of water in baptism, it does witness to the need for a baptism of the Holy Spirit.⁶⁶ 'For we were all baptised by one Spirit into one body.' (1 Cor. 12:13) However, to suggest that the Salvationist ceremony could be understood as a 'dry baptism'⁶⁷ does not help to recognise that the traditional understanding of baptism, like communion, involves both spiritual and material elements.

⁶³ Salvation Army, *Handbook* (2010), p.305.

⁶⁴ Salvation Army, *Handbook* (2010), p.296.

⁶⁵ Within this Salvation Army ceremony the officer is reminded, by a note in the ceremonies book, to formally welcome the newly enrolled soldier by means of a handshake – 'the hand of fellowship'. See: Salvation Army, *Ceremonies Book*, (London: Salvation Army, 1989), p5.

⁶⁶ This term is not to be confused with the doctrine of the Baptism of the Spirit as understood in Pentecostal/Charismatic traditions.

⁶⁷ John Read, cited in Street, *Called*, p.109.

In light of this it would be incorrect to imply that there are no material elements present at the swearing-in of a new soldier. It is a requirement that the ceremony takes place under the colours of the trinitarian Salvation Army flag. Likewise, as is most often the case, the soldier will wear Salvation Army uniform for the first time. Could it be that there is an opportunity here for The Salvation Army to bring the significance of uniform to new light and recognise that the application of uniform has sacramental overtones?

General Paul Rader has publicly stated that ‘Uniform is like baptism – an outward sign of inward grace.’⁶⁸ While it is recognized here that this was not made as a definitive statement of Salvationist theology, it does reflect the official affirmations of the Spiritual Life Commission who would later pick up this theme in their deliberations over the reintroduction of sacraments. One significant difference is that the Commission places an emphasis on the swearing-in ceremony as an alternative to baptism rather than the actual uniform itself.

So can the wearing of uniform become a Salvationist equivalent of water baptism? It would take little practical effort in the current proceedings of a swearing-in ceremony to include an element where soldiers being enrolled literally clothed themselves with the uniform tunic. Water would not need to feature, but a symbolic and material act would have taken place filling what Lawson critically applies towards the Army as a failure in providing for ‘the inherent need for symbolism and for the idea that symbols are more than empty objects.’⁶⁹

Signs and Symbols

What then is meant by symbols? Dillistone offers an explanation by making a separation of understanding between signs and symbols. Stating that at its most basic level a symbol is something that ‘connects two entities’, he cites the Greek root word *symbollein*.⁷⁰ This word is translated as to match where two pieces of a corresponding entity were brought together as a sign of authentication. However, when it comes to differentiating between a symbol and a sign, Dillistone notes:

⁶⁸ Paul Rader, quoted in ‘Salvationist’, No. 504, 25th November 1995, p.1.

⁶⁹ Kenneth Lawson, *Sacraments and Symbols in The Salvation Army*, MA Dissertation, (Durham: University of Durham, 1996), p.200.

⁷⁰ F.W. Dillistone, *The Power of Symbols*, (London: SCM Press, 1986), p.12.

Each points beyond itself to something else. But whereas a sign is univocal, arbitrary and replaceable, having no intrinsic relationship with that to which it points, a symbol actually participates in the reality to which it is directed and which in some degree it represents.⁷¹

Likewise, Tillich states that, ‘A sacramental symbol is neither a thing nor a sign. It participates in the power of what it symbolizes, and therefore it can be a medium of the Spirit.’⁷² For The Salvation Army the significance of a symbol is only made clear ‘through teaching and mutual agreement between those who use it in their communication.’⁷³

Rightmire takes a view of the uniform that sees a necessity of its symbolism as leading to further discipleship of the soldier. ‘The meaningfulness of the uniform as a symbol of God’s grace is dependent on the relation between the signification and the reality of that which is signified in the Salvationist’s life. Holiness is not only symbolized, but also nurtured by uniform wearing.’⁷⁴

Such an approach may fully justify the wearing of uniform as a sacramental symbol within the life of the soldier. Certainly the idea of being ‘clothed... in righteousness’ (Isaiah 61:10), or ‘clothed with Christ’ (Galatians 3:27) as bringing about a spiritual dimension leading to holiness links very easily and symbolically with wearing a particular set of religious clothing.

Salvation Army Uniform as Sacrament

But can the theology of the uniform be pushed further? Though it has already been stated above and has been argued over many years that The Salvation Army does not observe the sacraments would there be any scope, should the Army choose, to consider the wearing of uniform not only as symbolic or sacramental, but a sacrament itself? Within a protestant tradition the case would seem clearly settled in the negative. There are only two sacraments as confirmed by Luther, both instituted by Christ: baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

⁷¹ Dillistone, *Symbols*, p.123.

⁷² Tillich, Paul, *Systematic Theology 3*, (London: SCM Press, 1978), p.130.

⁷³ Salvation Army, *Chosen to be a Soldier*, p.23.

⁷⁴ Rightmire, *Sacramental Journey*, p.142.

On the other hand, if the history of sacraments is traced back further to the medieval definition of Peter Lombard then it can be seen that a sacrament is something which ‘bears a likeness to the thing of which it is a sign.’⁷⁵ This meaning certainly rings true in such instances as the waters of baptism signifying cleansing, or the bread and wine signifying the body and blood of Christ. So can it be applied to the uniform as a sign of being ‘clothed in righteousness’? Where Lombard’s definition of a sacrament would part company with Salvationist theology is that it is ‘a sign of the grace of God and a form of invisible grace.’⁷⁶ The uniform could not be considered as a form of saving grace or merit for spiritual regeneration, for grace is through faith alone.⁷⁷

However, continue in the retrospective path of theology and Augustine presents a wonderfully broad definition with the potential for understanding the Salvation Army uniform as a sacrament. For Augustine, a sacrament must both be a sign and bear some relation to the thing which is signified. It does not equate to conferring grace, rather a sacrament is a ‘sign of a sacred thing.’⁷⁸ Using this understanding an argument could be made for viewing the uniform as a sign of being clothed in righteousness.

Of course, the argument is moot within current Salvationist doctrine as a stance of non-observance in sacraments holds sway. Beyond that, the wider church would call into question an alignment with the historically held view of sacraments, whether accepted as two or seven.

An earlier edition of the Army’s Handbook of Doctrine sets out a theological and doctrinal case for the non-observance of sacraments. It then concludes with the statement that The Salvation Army has ‘*instituted*’ other means as a parallel for the traditional sacraments and includes the Army Uniform in that list, stating that these solemn obligations have ‘spiritual meaning and significance.’⁷⁹ An emphasis on the term *instituted* has here been added to highlight the historical approach to the uniform by giving it a weighty theological status within The Salvation Army’s own ecclesiology.

⁷⁵ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), p.512.

⁷⁶ McGrath, *Christian Theology*, p.512.

⁷⁷ See Ephesians 2:8-9.

⁷⁸ McGrath, *Christian Theology*, p.511.

⁷⁹ Salvation Army, The, *The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine*, (London: Salvation Amy, 1935), p.174.

But can a practice be self-instituted? Clearly there is no direct Scriptural reference to Christ instituting a tradition of wearing religious clothing. (Though a tenuous argument could perhaps be made using passages from Revelation such as 6:11 and 22:14.) However, traditional views of practices such as Holy Communion would appeal to direct institution through the words of Christ: ‘Do this in remembrance of me’ (1 Corinthians 11:24). To this, The Salvation Army asks the rather provocative question, ‘Do what?’ opening up a line of questioning as to whether what is now practiced (in its multifarious forms) is authentically what Jesus actually instituted.⁸⁰

So then, is there any other way in which the wearing of uniform can be understood as promoting spiritual significance? Returning to the Wesleyan heritage within the Army an answer may be found in examining Wesley’s means of grace.

Salvation Army Uniform as a Means of Grace

Wesley believed that certain methods prevailed, some ordained by Christ, as a resource of making God’s grace known to believers and identified as means of grace. In what could be seen as an expanded definition of the widely accepted view of a sacrament as an outward sign of an invisible grace, Wesley notes that these means of grace are ‘outward signs, words or actions ordained of God, and appointed for this end – to be the ordinary channels whereby he might convey to men preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace.’⁸¹

In other words, God’s grace is conferred to the life of the believer *by the Holy Spirit through* the means of elements both material and spiritual. For some who receive this grace it comes as the ongoing work of sanctification. Other means may precede this work through justification by faith, while for the life of one seeking knowledge of the Lord these means of grace are experienced through the prevenient work of the Spirit. It is important in Wesleyan theology to distinguish the fact that it is not the acts in themselves that have wrought grace, but in the same way that one is fully justified by grace through faith in Christ Jesus so the same Spirit is at work in further making known God’s grace through various means.

⁸⁰ Street, *Called*, p.27.

⁸¹ John Wesley, *Forty-Four Sermons*, (Marston Gate: Amazon, Date not given),p.70.

For Wesley, these means of grace are shared across two specific groupings, one general and the other particular. The former is recognised as the intentional ways in which a Christian life is lived through the formative practices of faith. Knight suggests such means as obedience, keeping the commandments, daily taking up of the cross, and the development of becoming more aware of the presence of God.⁸²

In addition to these are the particular means which are categorized as either instituted or prudential means. The instituted means of grace, that is to say instituted by Christ, include prayer, searching the Scriptures, receiving the Lord's Supper, fasting and Christian conference.⁸³ Meanwhile the prudential means incorporated 'rules...with the goal of growing in grace.'⁸⁴

Though not enshrined in its doctrinal statement of faith, The Salvation Army is very familiar with the term means of grace even giving it high prominence within its hymnal – The Songbook of the Salvation Army⁸⁵. Within its pages, which are laid out to some degree as a systematic theology, there is a section titled Means of Grace. The subsections consisting of hymns centred around the themes of Prayer, Scriptures, and The Church. Each of these correlate to three of Wesley's means namely prayer, the reading of scripture, and Christian conference.

With such language already in place the Army is in a position to promote a deeper appreciation of this aspect of theology, recognising that many of the elements of Wesley's means – both general and particular – are present within Salvationist discipleship.

Knight is keen to stress that in the theology and understanding of Wesley the means of grace provide the opportunity for a broader encounter with God, bringing back into prevalence the 'rich understanding of sacramentality' which was previously enjoyed by the early church before the more settled and definitive practice of two (or seven) sacraments became

⁸² Henry H. Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace*, (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1992), p.5.

⁸³ Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007), p.257-8.

⁸⁴ Collins, *Theology of John Wesley*, p.266.

⁸⁵ Salvation Army, *The Songbook of The Salvation Army*, (London: Salvation Army, 2015)

formalised. It is these means that provide ‘descriptive access to the character of and identity of God through narrative, imagery, and metaphor.’⁸⁶

Such an approach may further support development in the theology of Salvation Army uniform. For narrative, imagery and most certainly metaphor make up a significant ontological understanding of The Salvation Army. This is a Christian movement that lives out the narrative of redemption, salvation and holy transformation in a revivalist spirit using the bright and colourful imagery of flags, crests and uniforms living within a framework of a quasi-military metaphor.

When this concept is extended to include the uniform then a fresh, metaphorical narrative may be provided in which the imagery of wearing the uniform can again be likened to the aforementioned Scriptural citations on being clothed in righteousness.⁸⁷ This metaphor then is seen to be used as a means of grace in the action of putting on these holy robes. The idea of this dynamic being applied to a theological understanding of the putting on of uniform could relate to the kinetic action witnessed in the pouring of water and the breaking of bread. Of course care would need to be taken not to confuse such an approach with the belief that the physical elements – in this case the uniform – actually confer grace. A Salvationist stance would agree with Collins’ Wesleyan understanding that, ‘these channels of grace...must ever point beyond themselves to something more vital.’⁸⁸

Wesley writes, ‘Remember to also use all the means *as means*; as ordained, not for their own sake, but in order to the renewal of your soul in righteousness and true holiness.’⁸⁹ Within such a statement lies the potential for awakening or re-awakening a spiritual verve for the wearing of uniform. If a Salvation Army soldier can, by faith, pray and reflect at the very moment of putting on this garb each time then a ‘renewal of [the] soul’ may be enlivened and a fresh reminder of God’s work of grace become materially evident in their life – not to mention the reminder of the covenantal promises that were made when first becoming a soldier. This of course is only the beginning of the renewal. The fruit of this comes in the grace-filled life which is lived out in holy community, neighbourhood, workplace and home.

⁸⁶ Henry H. Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace*, (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1992), p.191.

⁸⁷ See Isaiah 61:10 & Galatians 3:27

⁸⁸ Collins, *Theology of John Wesley*, p.258.

⁸⁹ Wesley, *Sermons*, p.77.

Holiness, Mission and the Future Purposes of Salvation Army Uniform

In drawing these viewpoints to a close some further reflections and proposals are offered. It has been the position of this study to ground the Salvation Army uniform in an understanding of the movement's Wesleyan holiness tradition. Therefore, the starting place of the uniform is that it must first be a witness to the self; a reminder that the soldier is called to live in the fullness of salvation to the uttermost; the blood and the fire, saved and sanctified. However, the witness must not remain insular. If the experience of sanctification as stated above produces a perfect, holy love for God and love for neighbour then it would inevitably seem that the Christian faith should not just be good for one's self, but also of benefit for those around you. This is the witness to the world which manifests itself in holy mission.

Helps to Holy Mission

While the methods of evangelical fervour may have changed over the years the motivation has not. Viewed from within the framework of Wesley's doctrine of entire sanctification Knight and Powe bring to attention the need for holy mission to be seen as an extension of perfect love.

Evangelistically this means we must learn to honestly reflect the love and compassion of Christ and not attempt to manipulate others in the name of Christ. Scaring people into loving Christ is not what Wesley means by loving God with one's whole heart and our neighbour as ourselves.⁹⁰

Such a sentiment is reflected in the international mission statement of The Salvation Army that presents its ministry as 'motivated by love for God.'⁹¹ Such a fullness of love, if understood and realised, is what drives the mission of The Salvation Army to both preach the gospel and meet human needs. The wearing of the uniform can become a reminder of such motivation if Salvationists choose to reflect on its call to holiness.

⁹⁰ Henry H. Knight & F. Douglas Powe, *Transforming Evangelism: The Wesleyan Way of Sharing Faith*, (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2006), p.81.

⁹¹ Salvation Army, *Handbook* (2010), p.266.

In relation to the experience of holiness and holy living as a driving force for mission, Coutts reflects on the doctrinal position of sanctification within The Salvation Army from the perspective of the early leaders: ‘As the desire to holiness fell off, in their opinion, so love for the salvation of souls would diminish as well.’⁹²

It is not the aim of this study to track the decline in holiness teaching throughout the present-day Salvation Army. Suffice to say that purely based on personal experience it would be evident that this jewel of Salvationism seems to have been covered over and somewhat buried by well intentioned social welfare programmes and the perceived need for assimilation with contemporary ecclesiastical methods. Deeper reflection is needed to ponder the question of whether it is easier to deal with another person’s human needs or develop a plan for church mission rather than work towards the holiness of one’s own heart. The argument of this study would offer that the latter would inevitably have a positive effect the former.

Could it be then that as the pneumatological foundations of The Salvation Army’s pursuit of holiness have diminished, so too has its ability to experience the dynamic evangelical harvest it claimed as the reason for its name? It would seem that this treasure of holiness is waiting to be discovered again – if only evidenced by the desire of this writer to explore such themes.

While those questions need to be explored elsewhere, what lies at the heart of this study is the value of the uniform to be holy and wholly transformative to the individual leading to missional engagement with many. Yet what would be the practical implications of such an approach for a uniformed body of believers who mostly wear their uniform solely on Sundays and special occasions?

While uniform is compulsory for Salvation Army officers, many of whom wear it throughout their day to day ministry, the same principle does not apply to the members of a congregation. In the early days of the Army soldiers were strongly encouraged to publicly declare their allegiance to Christ through the Salvation Army uniform. Where this was not possible, guidance was given that, ‘every soldier should feel under obligation to wear, during the week, some token of his union with The Army.’⁹³ Historically this could have taken the

⁹² Coutts, John, *The Salvationists*, (London: Mowbrays, 1977), p.54.

⁹³ Booth, Florence, *Army Uniform*, p.4.

form of a badge or shield, or perhaps the ribbon which once was given to new converts following a commitment to the Lord.

In this point alone there is merit for potential renewal of this practice within today's Salvation Army. It is accepted practice for many members of the public to wear upon their person some form of symbol in support of a cause – be it a red poppy, a yellow daffodil, or a white ribbon. Indeed many still wear a Christian symbol of a small lapel pin in the form of a cross or a necklace of the same, though that may be somewhat mostly hidden from view.

Small lapel badges of Salvation Army insignia are already currently available to wear in the form of the Army crest and shield. In light of the symbology highlighted earlier there may be scope for the production of 'S's as easy means by which any article of clothing can have affixed upon it the reminder of the life to which a Salvationist is called.

Is Uniform Dispensable?

Condensing a theological understanding of the uniform into such simple measures does of course present a further question. If a theological response to uniform can be reduced to a lapel badge is there actually any need for the Salvation Army uniform at all? Putting aside the obvious correlation between uniform and The Salvation Army's military metaphor as a church, is there an argument to be made that it is enough to merely understand the theology behind the uniform and that the actual wearing of the same is superfluous if the grace it stands for is experienced? This would take a similar line to the Salvationists theological approach to the participation in the sacraments. Needless to say the vast majority of Christians worldwide and through the ages have not worn a uniform. However, it remains difficult to make a separation between The Salvation Army's ontological understanding and the trappings of its quasi-military style. What is an army without a uniform? A militia? A rebellion? A secret, hidden cell? All this would run against its stated aim to be a visible, active and transforming presence in communities. Florence Booth argues that, 'if the uniform be not worn, the message it speaks is not uttered, and the moral help which the uniform gives to the wearer to take hold of the opportunity is absent.'⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Booth, Florence, *Army Uniform*, p.7.

A further point that should also be made clear is that any call to do away with the uniform as an unrecognisable symbol cannot be blamed on the uniform itself. A uniform hanging neatly in a wardrobe will always remain unrecognisable.

Meanwhile, another argument for the disuse of uniform could be based on its perceived exclusivity. While some may state that the uniform is unrecognisable in the public sphere, others may draw attention to a potential internal issue of the uniform creating barriers within congregations – a ‘them and us’ mentality. However, research undertaken in this field (though limited) seemed to propose otherwise.

Regarding the nature and perception of a sense of belonging in the fellowship of a Salvation Army corps, Price concludes that, ‘research would suggest that there is very little effect on people’s sense of belonging [with just] a slight bias towards those who wear uniform.’⁹⁵

Likewise, Clift’s research into the effect of uniform wearing on group identity seems to yield similar results.⁹⁶ While there were perspectives of inclusion and exclusion within a corps it was not particularly related to the wearing of uniform.⁹⁷ Human nature and group dynamics would confirm this to be the case in multiple contexts totally unrelated to The Salvation Army.

But what of the opposite approach? Would there be any merit for offering the wearing of uniform to all and any who simply attend Salvation Army worship services – whether those who have made the covenant promises of a soldier or those simply asking questions of faith? Returning to the theme of the uniform as a means of grace, Wesley stated that one aspect of these means reflects the prevenient nature of God’s grace in the life of one who has yet to make a full commitment to Christ. Could the Holy Spirit work in grace by means of wearing a uniform for an individual who has made no profession of faith? This would certainly highlight the notion of belonging before believing, but at the same time negate the principle that the wearer is living in full salvation.

⁹⁵ Wayne Price, *What impact does the concept of Salvation Army uniform have on a sense of belonging?*, BA Dissertation, (London: William Booth College, 2010, p.25).

⁹⁶ Shelagh Clift, *How does the wearing of Salvation Army uniform affect group identity?*, BA Dissertation, (London: William Booth College, 2014).

⁹⁷ The only exception to this was membership of the musical sections such as the band and songsters (choir).

A final alternative viewpoint may be to approach the meaning of uniform in a similar fashion to Paul's teaching in Romans. While Paul affirmed that Gentiles did not need to participate in the physical mark of covenantal relationship, they were implored to understand the principle of the 'circumcision of the heart' (Romans 2:29). Likewise a Salvationist will not always wear a uniform, but if the principles of a theological study such as this rings true then the approach would be a uniform of the heart. The weekly (or potentially more often) event of wearing the uniform for worship or service to the community presents the opportunity to renew the covenantal promises made at enrolment.

Symbolic Application of the Uniform in the Swearing-in Ceremony

All of these thoughts then need to be brought back to the place where uniform is first worn. Commencement in the benefits of wearing Salvation Army uniform usually occurs at the time of being enrolled. As it currently stands, the official ceremony for swearing-in and enrolling a new Salvation Army soldier into membership does not contain any reference to wearing uniform and its sacred associations. Despite official attempts to formulate the parallels between water baptism and the swearing-in ceremony of a soldier, there still remains a ritualistic disconnect in symbolism. Could the action of putting on the uniform be incorporated into the Salvationist ceremony to more deeply reflect the stated theological similarities? In other words, a call for official, ceremonial recognition that the uniform is a baptismal symbol and an ongoing means of grace to holiness.

Going forward the potential helpfulness of such a practice would be that the wearers of uniform would want to begin a spiritual discipline in reminding themselves of the covenant they have made each and every time they dress in Salvation Army uniform. Such an approach would completely dispel the notion of uniform as corporate dress and bring it into the realms of a sacramental act – an aid to holy living.

An argument in opposition to such a proposal would be the appeal to the historic Salvationist understanding of sacramentalism which is 'free from ritual, independent of formal outward

observances and material elements.’⁹⁸ However, there cannot be any argument that within soldiership there is linked to this disciplined life a very real, physical element in the form of uniform. And so, if not formalised within ceremony, there needs to be a refreshing of the narrative of the uniform as a witness to the self before it can ever be used as a witness to the world. The soldier is saved and sanctified and the joy of full salvation has the potential to inspire them in mission to both serve and indeed see others saved.

⁹⁸ Clifton, *Who are these Salvationists?*, p.59.

Conclusion

The intention of this study has been to develop a theology around the sacramental opportunities that are evident in the disciplined wearing of Salvation Army uniform as an aid to holy living. Through reflection on the history and use of uniform it has become evident that there is potentially more to the currently held opinion regarding its common purpose and function as a witness to others. What has become apparent is that the discoveries through historical research have shown that the theology developed here is not necessarily a new one. Rather it is a case of reawakening the sacred associations of the uniform which have perhaps lain dormant for a number of years.

When viewed alongside both biblical and ecclesiastical modes of religious garments similarities have been seen: clothing that sets the wearer apart, a witness to God's calling, and a spiritual significance placed upon the dress which points beyond itself. The greatest difference is that for biblical garments and clergy robes these vestments are reserved for the ordained. In The Salvation Army all who commit to full membership as soldiers are permitted to wear uniform.

Meanwhile, despite The Salvation Army's long held position of non-observance in the sacraments the Army does not deny being sacramental both on lifestyle and ceremonies that enrich the worshipping congregation. Within these ceremonies are opportunities to view practices in the light of the wider church. In doing so, sacred ceremonies such as the swearing-in of a new soldier are, by Salvationist theological understanding, in line with the practice of baptism. Both affirm Salvation through faith while also welcoming an individual into Christian fellowship. It has been noted that where these similarities diverge is in the desire to participate in the use of physical elements as ritual – in this case, the waters of baptism. This study has suggested that the physical act of putting on the uniform may be seen as going some way to visually symbolise a change in nature which has been wrought through the baptism of the Spirit.

It is in the donning of uniform that the Salvationist is reminded time and again that they have partaken in the salvation that comes through Christ and are clothed with his righteousness. This is a process that does not end with a soldier's welcome into fellowship, but continues as they grow in grace into holiness. The simple prompt of the 'S's on the collar of the uniform

provide a doctrinal reminder that the soldier is called to the experience of salvation to the uttermost: Saved and Sanctified. It is from this knowledge and desire to be filled with a perfect love for God which naturally leads to a love for others that the uniformed Salvationist engages in a holy mission of evangelism and social action. They are Saved to Save and also Saved to Serve. Therefore, before the uniform is understood as an explicit witness to the world it is best to first appreciate it as an implicit witness to the self and a means by which the saving and sanctifying grace of Christ is made visible.

A Doxology

No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in him, is mine.
Alive in him, my living head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach the eternal throne
And claim the crown through Christ, my own.

(Charles Wesley)

Appendix A

Example of Salvation Army Uniform



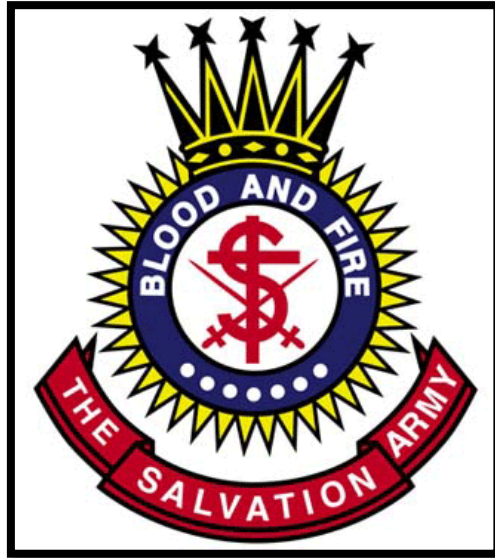
Male officer uniform ~ Captain



'S' on the collar

Appendix B

Selected Symbols of The Salvation Army



Salvation Army Crest



Salvation Army Flag

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