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An enormous amount of energy and resources are spent around the world to improve people's Standard of Living (SoL). Broadly, SoL is measured by tracking a person's income and consumption. Income indicates the amount of resources that a person or household has available to procure goods and services from the market. Consumption, which can occur as a result of purchasing goods and services or through household production (e.g., growing one's own food), measures the extent to which a person or household can access at least the basic necessities of life.¹ The lower a person's SoL, the less of those necessities are available to a person, and the less likely it is that person will be able to improve her or his socio-economic situation.

While improving people's SoL was never a stated goal of Jesus or the early church, their evangelistic outreach often involved doing so. Jesus healed and fed people even as he taught them about the Kingdom of God. The first Christians invited people to join a community in which they shared their possessions as well as attended to the Apostolic preaching of the gospel. Later Christians in Rome and Byzantium were known both for their message of salvation and for their care of the sick, orphans, widows, and travelers.²

Christian congregations continue in the same vein, combining the work of improving people's SoL with their evangelism. It even appears that most congregations today, especially United Methodist congregations, see working to improve people's SoL as their primary form of missional activity.³

In spite of this close relationship between evangelism and improving people's SoL in Christian practice, the exact connection between the two has not always been clear. Is improving people's SoL part of the evangelistic act leading to someone's salvation? If so, is it a precursor to sharing the gospel or an enactment of the gospel itself? Or, is it a separate act that complements the work of evangelism, but is not part of it? Or, rather than an act, is it an outcome of successful evangelism? Whether or not it is an evangelistic act, should the church be working to improve people's SoL individually or on a systemic level or both?

There is no lack of advice for how Christians should relate improving people's SoL to evangelism. However, those who offer this advice often disagree. Craig Ott's book, *The Mission of the Church*, which explores five perspectives of Christian missions demonstrates this. Representing Orthodox, Catholic, and three Protestant traditions, the authors each approach this relationship in a different way. Bracketing the extreme ends, Ruth Padilla DeBorst argues that evangelism must include an intentional effort to transform society in a way that provides a better SoL for all people⁴ while Ed Stetzer insists that evangelism must refer only to the verbal proclamation of the gospel.⁵

¹ There is a substantial literature that delves into the various methodologies and complexities of measuring SoL. For the sake of this paper, we will remain at this basic level of definition. Owen O'Donnell, Eddy van Doorslaer, Adam Wagstaff, and Magnus Lindelow, *Analyzing Health Equity Using Household Survey Data: A Guide to Techniques and Their Implementation* (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2008), 69.

² Amy G. Oden, ed. *And You Welcomed Me: A Sourcebook on Hospitality and Early Christianity* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 18-26.

³ Mark R. Teasdale, "Quality of Life and Mission" in *Missiology* vol 44, issue 3, July 2016, 277.

⁴ Ruth Padilla DeBorst, "An Integral Transformation Approach" in *The Mission of the Church: Five Views in Conversation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2016), 44.

⁵ Ed Stetzer, "An Evangelical Kingdom Community Approach" in Ott, 106, 110.

This lack of agreement leaves local churches without direction for their outreach activities. This often leads to local churches choosing outreach activities that are most interesting to them without the ability to articulate how those activities are different than what a civic organization might do, much less how they relate to evangelism. This is especially true for United Methodist churches.⁶

This paper does not seek to argue for a normative way that evangelism should be related to improving SoL, but to provide a description of possible relationships between the two. The goal of these descriptions is to provide Christian congregations with two benefits. The first is a diagnostic tool to help them determine how they already are relating the two by finding which description matches their existing practices most closely.

The second is to help them better articulate their faith, especially their vision of salvation. How Christians practice evangelism is directly related to the ultimate good they want people to experience as a result of that evangelism.⁷ By diagnosing how it already connects evangelism to improving people's SoL, a congregation will gain insight into the motivating hopes it has behind its work. This will give the congregation language for expressing their faith in ways that are authentic to its existing practices.

As a corollary to this new ability to articulate its faith, congregations may also gain the ability to modify their faith if they determine that the kind of faith they are witnessing to is not reflective of what they want to invite people to believe. Along the same lines, this new awareness will give congregation's a sense for whether they are deploying their resources effectively to share the faith with others.

Determining the Descriptions

The descriptions provided on this diagnostic tool come from a survey of three Methodist leaders in England during the mid- to late-nineteenth century. I selected these leaders and this time period for two reasons. First, because all of them come from the Methodist tradition, it allowed for a comparison that held most cultural and theological variables constant, allowing me to focus specifically on how these leaders approached the issue of evangelism in relationship to improving SoL. Second, these leaders all were directly spoke to the the practices of evangelism and improving people's SoL, in some cases having their careers and ministries defined by these issues.

Faced with the rapid social changes caused by the rise of industrial capitalism in England,⁸ British Methodists during this time explicitly experimented with several approaches for relating

⁶ Heather Heinzman Lear, *Reclaiming Evangelism: Evaluating the Effect of Evangelism in Selected United Methodist Congregations on Fulfilling the Denominational Mission to Make Disciples*, DMin diss., Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Evanston, IL, 77.

⁷ Mark R. Teasdale, *Evangelism for Non-Evangelists: Sharing the Gospel Authentically* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2016), 33.

⁸ Bridgette Wessels, *Exploring Social Change: Process and Context* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), ch. 4; and Roger Lloyd-Jones and M.J. Lewis, *British Industrial Capitalism since the Industrial Revolution* (London: UCL Press, 1998), chs. 4-6.

evangelism to improving people’s SoL. These experiments launched three major mission initiatives, including the Wesleyan Methodist Mission Society, the Salvation Army, and the Forward Movement within the Wesleyan Methodist Church. Each of these represented different approaches to connecting improving SoL and evangelism as defined by their respective leaders: Jabez Bunting, William Booth, and Hugh Price Hughes.

From a focused survey of these three leaders’ thinking, we can develop the following set of descriptions for how evangelism and improving people’s SoL can relate to one another:

Relationship of Improving SoL to Evangelism	Hoped for Outcome
Improved SoL a requirement for being evangelized – people improve themselves	Conversion/civilization of those evangelized and a respectable institutional church
Evangelize people of all SoLs in their specific contexts – church converts, does not improve	Conversion/civilization of those evangelized and a respectable institutional church
Church improves SoL as precursor to verbal evangelism	Conversion and a better life for those evangelized
Church improves SoL as an act of evangelism	Transformed/holy society
State works with church to enact justice – church is chaplain	Improved SoL for all people

This paper describes each entry as it was articulated by the various leaders. It will conclude with applications for these insights for present-day congregations.

Caveats

There are some important cautions that go along with this paper that need to be addressed lest either its intent is misconstrued, or someone misapplies the information in it.

First, focusing only on how evangelism intersects with improving people’s standard of living might seem to be too restrictive. Even secular agencies point to numerous other ways to define people’s well-being, such as quality of life or happiness. Worse yet, it could be argued that standard of living is one of the more imperialistic measures because it can assume a normative standard that is set by the wealthy and privileged. Certainly, as will come clear in the following paper, the notion of civilizing people to bring them up to a wealthy British notion of living was very much at play in the leaders’ minds that I survey.

I agree with and accept this critique. At the same time, for all the ways that Christians who are socially and economically privileged have sought to move beyond this thinking, the basic logic of lifting people up to a normative standard of living remains at the heart of what many local congregations do. Based on the research of Lear, I am convinced that this is largely unexamined logic. The goal of the paper is not to reinforce this logic, then, but to raise that logic to a conscious level so it can be recognized and addressed. In this sense, this paper is to combat the very dangers of this kind of imperial thinking, not to establish it as normative.

Second, to reiterate from the introduction, these descriptions are *not* meant to be prescriptive. Rather, they are ways to for readers to consider how their congregation is already practicing evangelism in relationship to improving people's SoL. Given that lack of theological, and specifically soteriological, awareness many congregations have surrounding their work, this paper is meant to provide some basic language and concepts for them to articulate what they are doing and why. It also may give them impetus for changing their practices because they want to offer a different message of salvation through their ministrations.

Third, these descriptions are not exhaustive. While they do offer a wide-range of possible ways to connect evangelism and improving SoL, there are other ways to connect these two pieces. Most pointedly, given the Methodist theme, John Wesley would not match any of these descriptions because he understood improving people's SoL as an activity that developed as an outgrowth of holy living. Wesley's ministries focused first on verbally proclaiming the gospel and then calling those who committed themselves to that gospel to help him in supporting those in physical need. As such, not all congregations may find themselves among these descriptions. However, based on the lack of awareness and articulation on the part of many congregations related to these ministries, my strong sense is that these descriptions will be useful for the majority of those who read this.

Fourth, the descriptions are based on the thinking of particular leaders, not necessarily the practices of everyone who worked in their respective organizations. My approach to this is more of an intellectual historical approach, looking at how specific leaders developed their ideas around evangelism and SoL, not on reviewing the ways that they put those ideas to work on the ground.

Finally, a word is in order about my use of history. History is a descriptive and interpretive task. The historian is meant to sift through the primary documents and artifacts and, in conversation with others who have done the same, interpret those for others to better understand what occurred in the past. This was very much my approach to this paper, starting with the primary documents of each of the leaders I review. The descriptions arose out of this. I am aware that my teleological move, of using the descriptions to create established categories for how congregations in the present practice evangelism, is not appropriately the work of a historian. A better move would have been a historiographical one, in which I suggest an alternative way of interpreting the history I reviewed based on my research.

I in no way wish to impugn historical methodology. My reason for making this move has to do with the audience I have in mind for this paper. As a practical theologian, my primary audience is the practicing church rather than the academy. Based on this, I marshal my training as a historian to serve this purpose. So, I offer my apologies to the pure historians and plead their indulgence as they consider my work here.

With these caveats acknowledged, it is examine why the three leaders, Bunting, Booth, and Hughes, are of particular help in the enterprise of connecting evangelism and SoL.

Methodism in Nineteenth-Century England

The nineteenth century in England was a tumultuous time for Methodism. Following the death of John Wesley and the transfer of power to the Legal Hundred⁹ in the late eighteenth century, the Methodists had swiftly moved to establish themselves as an independent Nonconformist Church.¹⁰ Having done this, their focus turned to becoming a socially respectable church. A significant part of this was learning how to relate to the emerging social structure in England.¹¹

During this era, the English put Adam Smith's theories into practice alongside of the burgeoning industrial revolution, trusting in the market's invisible hand to distribute greater wealth across the nation. In doing this, they broke free of the strict social hierarchy that had long defined English class relations,¹² allowing for people to improve their social standing and, consequently, their SoL.¹³ England moved from having its social classes defined by heredity to having them defined by access to capital.

This new social mobility allowed for people who did not hail from aristocratic families to enter the upper and middle classes. Through thrift, hard work, education, and industrial innovation, the door was now open for commoners to join the ranks of the socio-economic elite.¹⁴

At the same time some English were enjoying this mobility, there was a shadow side to the new political economy. Along with mobility came the assumption that each person was responsible for his or her own success. The result was that the old system by which lords cared for the commoners vanished. This left especially rural people with scant means of support and led to the creation of urban slums as people moved into the cities in search of new wage labor positions. The misery of those so affected was broadly accepted, however. Since everyone presumptively had the opportunity to improve their lot in life, those who did not participate in that improvement were to blame for their failure.¹⁵

The ironic result of this was to create a set of barriers to social mobility for the poorest people even as social mobility became possible and celebrated more broadly. Rather than extend more

⁹ Samuel J. Rogal, "Legalizing Methodism: John Wesley's Deed of Declaration and the Language of the Law," *Methodist History*, 44:2 (Jan 2006); Dee E. Andrews, *The Methodists and Revolutionary America, 1760-1800: The Shaping of an Evangelical Culture* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), 65-66.

¹⁰ David W. Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience: Chapel and Politics, 1870-1914* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 2-4.

¹¹ E.R. Taylor, *Methodism and Politics: 1791-1851* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935), ch. 3; David Hempton, *Methodism and Politics in British Society, 1750-1850* (London and New York: Routledge, 1984 [2010]) ch. 3.

¹² David Cannadine, *The Rise & Fall of Class in Britain* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), ch. 3.

¹³ Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion: The Moral Imagination of the Late Victorians* (New York: Knopf, 1991), ch. 2.

¹⁴ Franklin F. Mendels, "Social Mobility and Phases of Industrialization," in *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 7 no. 2 (1976): 193-216; Jamie Bronstein and Andrew Harris, *Empire, State, and Society: Britain since 1830* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), ch. 3.

¹⁵ Andrew Miles, *Social Mobility in Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century England* (London: MacMillan Press LTD, 1999); E.K. Hunt, *Property and Prophets: The Evolution of Economic Institutions and Ideologies* [Seventh Edition] (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), ch. 3; Richard Dennis, *English Industrial Cities of the Nineteenth Century: A Social Geography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), ch. 6.

opportunity to the poor to help them out of their plight, the poor were seen as flawed individuals who were better off under the permanent care of the wealthy because the wealthy had proven themselves by succeeding in the new economy. As a result, the wealthy set up workhouses in which the poor were treated almost as criminals in an attempt to reform their character.¹⁶ The wealthy did this even as they benefitted from paying low wages because of the large amount of unskilled labor available to them.

As has historically been the case for Methodists in the United States,¹⁷ Methodists in England during this time were influenced by the conventional wisdom of the middle and upper classes. Just as these classes sought to dictate how they would relate to the lower classes of society, so the Wesleyan Methodist Church sought to dictate how sinners would relate to it. And, like the wealthy classes, it would demonstrate its right to set this relationship by making its social respectability as an institutional church the focus of its work.

Jabez Bunting and a Respectable Church

The leadership of Jabez Bunting (1779-1858) over the Wesleyan Methodist Church epitomized this wealthy-class thinking. A four-time president of the conference, member of the Legal Hundred, and long-serving secretary of the Wesleyan Missionary Society, Bunting wielded substantial influence over British Methodism during his lifetime. Driven by a desire to increase the social standing of the Wesleyan Methodist Church, he led the church to develop colleges to prepare educated itinerant preachers and missionaries¹⁸ and to construct numerous new Methodist chapels.¹⁹

Having established the church's respectability in these tangible ways, Bunting moved to press for Methodists to demonstrate their respectability through their decorum.²⁰ He did this especially by emphasizing the sober nature of Christian salvation. An example of this is found in a sermon he preached at the opening of new Methodist chapels, entitled "God in the Assembly of the Saints."

In the sermon, he made the point that Christians could experience joy. "Holy joy," he proclaimed, "is a constituent part of genuine piety; a never-failing fruit of the Spirit of faith and adoption which dwells in the hearts of saints."²¹ However, this joy was a somber thing, "a passion of our sanctified nature, which it is our duty, not to repress, but to cherish and indulge."²² Far from an exuberant expression of gratitude in Jesus Christ, it was a dutiful act that we had to obediently express.

¹⁶ David Sunderland, *Social Capital, Trust and the Industrial Revolution, 1780-1880* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), ch. 4.

¹⁷ Mark R. Teasdale, *Methodist Evangelism, American Salvation: The Home Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1860-1920* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014), 1-10.

¹⁸ Christopher Oldstone-Moore, *Hugh Price Hughes: Founder of a New Methodism, Conscience of a New Nonconformity* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), 19.

¹⁹ David Hempton and John Walsh, "E.P. Thompson and Methodism," in *God and Mammon: Protestants, Money, and the Market, 1790-1860*, ed. by Mark Noll (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 106-107.

²⁰ Doreen Rosman, *The Evolution of the English Churches, 1500-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), ch. 9.

²¹ Jabez Bunting and W. L. Thornton, Sermon I, "God in the Assembly of the Saints," *Sermons*. (London: John Mason, 1861), 1.

²² *Ibid.*

The extent to which joy was a duty to be honored becomes even clearer when Bunting explained that the only way to experience it was by attending a worship service in a respectable Methodist chapel on the Sabbath:

Released, by the weekly return of the Christian Sabbath, from the turmoil of business, and from the toils of secular life, the faithful gladly repair to the sanctuary of God, and there hold communion with Him, and with each other. There they find a refuge from the cares of the world, an asylum in which their spirits are refreshed and tranquilized after the perplexities and conflicts by which they have been exercised. From this 'commerce with the skies' their emotions catch somewhat of a celestial ardour and blessedness; their joy approaches in its nature to that which seraphs feel before the throne.²³

To be sure, Bunting offered joy as a blessing that was uniquely offered to faithful Christians. Nested in his thinking, there is a call to conversion so people can gain access to the same joy the angels feel. However, this conversion and its attendant joy was only available in a rarified setting and when engaged in particular ecclesiastical activities. It was definitively not something that the church should offer to people in the midst of their daily lives.

According to Bunting, any effort by the church to reach out to people was all but sinful, especially because it often involved promoting a less exalted experience of joy. As such, he had little use for revivalists, which he openly criticized at the end of the sermon. Such ministers drew human attention away from God and toward earthly things. Those who had truly reverent joy, he declared, would be

diametrically opposed to all that impudent rudeness, that careless levity, and that carnal, boastful, tumultuous joy, which some religionists have presumed to obtrude on their Maker as the effusions of simplicity and zeal, but which are, in fact, the offspring only of ignorance and pride.²⁴

The church should guard itself against the misguided suggestion that it should lower itself to reach out to people as they are. To do so would degrade both the virtue of the church and of the reverent joy which it aspired all people to share in:

The reverential style of expression which I am now recommending is grievously violated by many: particularly, by such as do not hesitate to apply to God or to Christ, in their prayers and praises, those amorous and luscious appellatives, those epithets, expressive of the fondness of human passion, which, it has been well said, 'must revolt a man who feels that he cannot meet the same Being at once on terms of adoration and on caressing equality.' We Methodists are without excuse if we do not guard against this species of presumption.²⁵

²³ Ibid, 2.

²⁴ Ibid, 12.

²⁵ Ibid, 13.

(It is well that Bunting passed away prior to the advent of the Salvation Army bands parading through the streets of London!)

Based on these passages, we gain two crucial insights into Bunting's thinking that reveal his view of evangelism in relation to improving people's SoL. First, Bunting understood the church as a place. It was a sacred place, to be sure, and existed as a refuge from the strains and difficulties of the world. Nonetheless, it was a place, not a people or a movement.

Second, in order to access the blessings offered by the church, a person had to attend it. The sweet air of heaven was there for people to breathe, but only if they made the initiative to walk through the doors and attend an orderly worship service on the Sabbath. More than that, the people coming to the church had to act in a becoming way, letting go of all their carnal thoughts and daily concerns. Only then would the true blessings offered by the church reach them. In this sense, Bunting's soteriology involved three actors: the person in need of salvation, God who offered that salvation, and the respectable institutional church as the one and only site through which God made this salvation accessible.

By putting together these observations, we can see that the evangelistic work of the church was to be a respectable institution that could afford to set up beautiful buildings and provide properly trained clergy to officiate at orderly worship services. Beyond this, any further evangelistic work that would draw people into the joy of God was dependent on the people availing themselves of these ecclesial offerings. They needed to come to the church building and worship appropriately if they hoped to enter into the joy of the angels.

This logic would have a particular impact on the poor. It did not matter if they had to work seven days a week to make sufficient funds to survive or if they had only rags to wear or not enough food to sustain them awake through a worship service. The church was doing all it was supposed to on their behalf by having duly trained clergy to lead them and properly constructed chapels for them to enter. If their poverty prevented them from making use of these gifts, it was up to them to improve their SoL sufficiently so they could come and claim the church's evangelistic offerings that would lead them to joy.

This undoubtedly seems callous and short-sighted. However, there is nothing to suggest that Bunting would have backed away from this application of his thinking.²⁶ This might explain why the Wesleyan Methodist Church of the 1840s was later described by a representative of the Congregational Union as "rigid, frigid, enthroning the traditions of the past, bound up in red tape, and unable to look out and see what was going on in the world. It was then an institutional Church that had lost its mission, and was nothing more than an iron-bound clericalism."²⁷

This tone-deafness to the social realities of nineteenth-century England is especially visible in the lack of any political, economic, or social commentary in Bunting's sermons. Concerned with uplifting the respectability of the church as a spiritual institution required leaving such topics aside.

²⁶ David Hempton, *The Religion of the People: Methodism and Popular Religion c. 1750-1900* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 105.

²⁷ Arthur Walters, *Hugh Price Hughes: Pioneer and Reformer* (London: Robert Culley, 1907), 66.

The one exception to this came in his sermon entitled “Our Great Debt to Mankind.” In the introduction, Bunting grudgingly acknowledged that there are times the church must reach out to those who are in need prior to them first coming to the church.

Inasmuch as our means of evangelization are unavoidably limited, by our want of men, or of money, or of opportunity and access, so far are we at liberty, from among the various moral deserts of the world, which all demand our compassion, to select those regions as the scenes of our *earliest* exertions which seem likely to afford the speediest and richest harvests, at the smallest expense of toil and difficulty. But when the means are attainable, and the dark places of the earth are rendered accessible, we are not to lose our time in too nice or timid a calculation of comparative facilities, but are to rush into every open door.²⁸

This passage makes Bunting sound like a church planter who wants to marshal his meager resources to generate the greatest possible return on investment by first working among the middle and upper classes. Then, once he has sufficient stores built up, he can afford the cost in time and money that will be incurred by engaging with the poor and marginalized. At best, this is a secondary activity, not to be thought of prior to securing a church's respectability.

Even in saying this, Bunting quickly pivoted away from the idea of working with the poor in England. Rather, the “dark places of the earth” are the foreign mission field that are filled with heathens whose primary fault is not knowing the gospel. Provided that it was already respectable, the church could be excused for reaching out to these people because there was no way they could be expected to enter a Methodist chapel without Christians first guiding them there.

Bunting took pains to explain that the church's one and only mission in reaching out to these foreign people was to offer eternal salvation. It was not to improve their standard of living.

The dispensation of Christianity is eminently the dispensation of the Spirit. Education in secular knowledge, the cultivation of literature, arts, sciences, government, and laws, —these, and the like, are all instruments by which man may properly and laudably attempt to improve the general character, to refine the manners, and to promote the social and political happiness of his fellows. Nay, they are instruments of the successful employment of which we ought to acknowledge the agency of the God of *providence*. But the grand and direct instrument, which it pleases the God of *grace* to employ for the conversion and everlasting salvation of men, is not any one of these, nor a combination of all of them; but the Gospel, the doctrine of the Cross, the testimony of Jesus. To this a special influence of the Holy Ghost is graciously annexed.²⁹

It was good and well for people to improve in their SoL, and Bunting could even see the hand of God working to accomplish this through other social institutions. However, this was a matter indifferent to the true mission of the church. After all, what good was it for a person to become

²⁸ Bunting, Sermon XVIII “Our Great Debt to All Mankind,” 332. Emphasis original.

²⁹ Ibid, 334. Emphasis original.

educated and well-fed if that person remained a heathen and went to hell for lack of accepting the gospel of Jesus Christ? And, how could the heathen live in accordance to the true gospel unless the church remained a respectable institution that could inspire him or her to live a better life?

For those not quite convinced by Bunting's logic, he offered a final sop. Spreading the gospel as a spiritual activity, he argued, could result in improving people's standard of living even if that was not its purpose.

In far more instances, and in much greater degrees, as I humbly conceive, does Christianity promote civilization, than civilization Christianity. To evangelize the barbarous heathen is the way not only to save their souls, but to improve their minds and manners. Thus the way effectually to *humanize* the heathen is to evangelize and convert them.³⁰

Essentially, the work of the church would civilize foreign peoples sufficiently bring them to the same state as the one occupied by those who lived in Christian lands. Having been convinced of the grandeur of the church and the joy that could be claimed through the church, the foreign peoples would recognize that they needed to improve their own SoL in order to be worthy of the church's blessings. Then, as with those who lived in England, it was up to them to make the effort to receive the evangelistic gifts that the church offered them.

So it was that Bunting laid out a clear relationship between evangelism and improving people's SoL. For those living in Christian lands, the church had provided the required facilities and services for people to receive the gospel and be saved. It was up to people to improve their own SoL sufficiently to be converted and make use of the church's offerings for them. For those who were outside of Christian lands, the church needed to reach out to them, but was to ignore the people's SoL while doing this, focusing only on their need to accept the grace of God through Jesus Christ. Having done this, the church expected these people to be civilized enough to become like those from Christian lands and to begin improving their SoL so they could be converted and benefit from the church's respectability.

In both cases, the church neither needed to recognize nor interact with SoL. This was squarely outside of its mission. Rather, the church was to fulfill its purpose by being such a respectable institution that it inspired people to a better life in order to receive the joy that God only made available through it.

These are the first two descriptions of how evangelism and SoL relate to one another. They controlled the approach of Wesleyan Methodists toward evangelism for several decades during the nineteenth century. They also become the fault lines that would lead to the separation of William Booth from Wesleyan Methodism with the consequential founding of the Salvation Army and to the launching of the Forward Movement under Hugh Price Hughes.

Social Salvation and Eternal Salvation

³⁰ Ibid, 336-337. Emphasis original.

In 1844, a fifteen-year-old William Booth was converted by a Methodist preacher and soon after took up the work of evangelism by becoming a lay preacher in the Wesleyan Methodist Church. Working with his best friend Will Sansom, the two preached the gospel to the poor in Nottingham.

Following the death of Sansom, Booth moved to London and became frustrated with the lack of preaching opportunities he was receiving. This led to him leave the Wesleyan Methodists and join the Methodist New Connexion in 1851. Serving at a variety of appointed charges over the next decade, Booth became more convinced that his primary calling was to preach the gospel and requested that the conference appoint him as a general evangelist who could devote himself to running evangelistic campaigns full time. After three years of the conference denying this, Booth resigned in 1861 to become an independent evangelist. The New Connexion quickly banned Booth from running any evangelistic programs in their congregations.³¹

The New Connexion's action had an ironic twist to it. Given that John Wesley launched Methodism a century before by stretching the limits of his appointment at Oxford to allow him to evangelize across Anglican parish boundaries, the New Connexion's quick censuring of Booth to avoid him engaging in a similar activity shows just how far Bunting's anti-revivalist rhetoric had replaced Wesley's commitment to field preaching in British Methodism.³²

Left to establish an independent evangelistic ministry from the ground up, Booth initially founded the Christian Mission, headquartered in the poverty-stricken East End of London.³³ In the early days of the mission, Booth held evangelistic meetings almost daily and met with mixed success. He attracted some converts, but also many detractors.³⁴

In doing this, Booth borrowed from the way that Bunting had approached foreign missions. The idea was to meet the poor in their context, considering their situation to be so dire that they could not reasonably be expected to make their own way into a local church any more than a foreign heathen could be expected to do so.³⁵

While this approach to evangelism was essentially neutral in relation to SoL, only acknowledging that the SoL of the poor made it impossible for them to take the initiative in coming to conversion in a church building, this did not mean Booth was insensible to the difficulties that afflicted the poor. He did open some soup kitchens and, as he gained converts, expanded the locations where the Christian Mission operated to reach more people.³⁶ However, improving SoL was a secondary concern. This remained the case in 1878, when Booth renamed

³¹ Roger J. Green, *The Life & Ministry of William Booth Founder of the Salvation Army* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), chs. 4-6.

³² Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters, Volume III: The Crisis and Conscience of Nonconformity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 128.

³³ Green, 100-103.

³⁴ Pamela J. Walker, *Pulling the Devil's Kingdom Down: The Salvation Army in Victorian Britain* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), ch. 7.

³⁵ Denis Metrustery, "'Raised up by God...': Contextualising The Salvation Army in the Church and in the World," in *Saved, Sanctified and Serving: Perspectives on Salvation Army Theology and Practice*, ed. by Denis Metrustery (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2016), ch. 1.

³⁶ Norman H. Murdoch, *Origins of the Salvation Army* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1994), 60-66.

his organization the Salvation Army and adopted the military structure that it would retain from that point forward. However, this approach to SoL would soon change.

In 1888, Booth, then known as General Booth as the head of the Salvation Army, was “thunderstruck” to see homeless people sleeping underneath the bridges in London. In a conversation with his son and Chief of Staff, Bramwell Booth, General Booth demanded that the Salvation Army do something about this. The result of this brief interview was what his biography described as “the beginning of a new adventure.”³⁷ It was also the beginning of a new approach to how evangelism would relate to improving people's SoL.

The extent to which Booth's approach to evangelism changed is described by the book he published two years later, *In Darkest England and the Way Out*. In this text, Booth surveyed all the major social ills facing England in the late nineteenth century, including joblessness, homelessness, drunkenness, prostitution, the Poor Laws, unemployment, and the education system. All the people caught in dire circumstances he described as denizens of “darkest England.” He then described the work that the Salvation Army was already undertaking to address these people in their need and followed up with an expansive proposal for how to lead these people out of “darkest England” completely.

In doing this, Booth made it clear that he did not seek to deviate from his evangelistic calling. Rather, it was in the service of evangelism that the Salvation Army needed to undertake a massive new effort to improve people's SoL:

It will be seen therefore that in this or in any other development that may follow I have no intention to depart in the smallest degree from the main principles on which I have acted in the past. My only hope for the permanent deliverance of mankind from misery, either in this world or the next, is the regeneration or remaking of the individual by the power of the Holy Ghost through Jesus Christ. But in providing for the relief of temporal misery I reckon that I am only making it easy where it is now difficult, and possible where it is now all but impossible, for men and women to find their way to the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.³⁸

Even with this continued focus on eternal salvation, Booth nonetheless created a new way to see evangelism in relation to improving people's SoL. Specifically, he moved from treating SoL as a matter of indifference to seeing improving SoL as an essential precursor to evangelism. He came to believe that apart from improving someone's SoL, that person would be incapable of hearing and receiving the gospel. Helping people to attain a better SoL built the credibility for Christians to share the gospel and call for conversion.

This moves to the third description of how evangelism and SoL relate to one another: improving people's SoL as a precursor to evangelism. The desired outcome of this approach continued to be that a person converted and became a follower of Jesus Christ. However, an added outcome was

³⁷ Harold Begbie and Caroline Lewis, *The Life of General William Booth: The Founder of the Salvation Army*, vol. 2 (New York: Macmillan), ch. 7.

³⁸ General [William] Booth, *In Darkest England and the Way Out* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1890), Preface iii-iv.

that the person would be able to lead a better life immediately through access to employment, food, housing, and education.

This shift forced Booth to develop a new way of talking about salvation. Unlike Bunting, he could no longer hold up conversion while dismissively suggesting that, at best, those being evangelized might also become civilized. In no small part, this was because Booth's outcomes were defined by what happened outside of the church—that people were saved and gained better lives—rather than focusing on the respectability of the church itself. He had to work out a soteriology that bound together improving SoL and eternal salvation. He did this by conceiving of two types of salvation: social (or temporal) and eternal (or spiritual).

Social salvation was prompted from human compassion to alleviate the suffering of fellow humans. Eternal salvation was prompted by God's commission to make disciples. Speaking of how his personal calling to evangelistic work was now entailed moving people toward both salvations, Booth wrote "Alike, therefore, my humanity and my Christianity, if I may speak of them in any way as separate one from the other, have cried out for some more comprehensive method of reaching and saving the perishing crowds."³⁹

Because desire to work toward people's Social Salvation came from the universal human experience, Booth believed that he could work hand-in-hand with anyone who desired to improve the SoL of those who were suffering. This was true whether the other workers were Christians, Socialists, Individualists, or Statists. In all cases, they were doing the work of God. However, he did believe that the Christian faith provided a more solid ground for this work:

I have nothing to say against those who are endeavouring to open up a way of escape without any consciousness of God's help. For them I feel only sympathy and compassion. In so far as they are endeavouring to give bread to the hungry, clothing to the naked, and above all, work to the workless, they are to that extent endeavouring to do the will of our Father which is in Heaven, and woe be unto all those who say them nay! But to be orphaned of all sense of the Fatherhood of God is surely not a secret source of strength. It is in most cases— it would be in my own— the secret of paralysis.⁴⁰

Booth was not content to describe Social Salvation as only being prompted by generic humanism, though. Later in the text, he applied the Wesleyan *ordo salutis* to his thinking, arguing that if prevenient grace offers the hope of Eternal Salvation to all people, could he not also conceive of God's grace welcoming all people into a better SoL in this present life? To argue for the wideness of God's mercy in rescuing people from hell in the first instance while disallowing for that same mercy to save them from the hell of poverty, drunkenness, prostitution, and other social problems was hypocritical:

The Scheme of Social Salvation is not worth discussion which is not as wide as the Scheme of Eternal Salvation set forth in the Gospel. The Glad Tidings must be to every creature, not merely to an elect few who are to be saved while the mass

³⁹ Ibid, Preface ii.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 35.

of their fellow are predestined to a temporal damnation. We have had this doctrine of an inhuman cast-iron pseudo-political economy too long enthroned amongst us. It is now time to fling down the false idol and proclaim a Temporal Salvation as full, free, and universal, and with no other limitations than the "Whosoever will," of the Gospel.⁴¹

One example Booth gave of how the Salvation Army was already seeking to engage in evangelism that led to both Social Salvation and Eternal Salvation was through describing the work of the Slum Sisters. These were female Salvation Army soldiers who lived among the poor in the most wretched parts of London. He wrote,

To form an idea of the immense amount of good, temporal and spiritual, which the Slum Sister is doing; you need to follow them into the kennels where they live, preaching the Gospel with the mop and the scrubbing brush, and driving out the devil with soap and water.⁴²

For Booth, this was how evangelism was done: sharing the gospel verbally *and* with actions that improved people's standard of living. Evangelism involved tangibly bringing people Social Salvation by improving their SoL as a precursor to Eternal Salvation being offered.

Booth's desire was to expand the Salvation Army's work of bringing Social Salvation so it could have a nationwide impact. As he described in *In Darkest England*, he would do this through the establishment of three types of colonies: the city colony, the farm colony, and the overseas colony. The first would provide for the immediate needs of men and women who did not have the wherewithal to provide the necessities of life for themselves or their families. The second was a self-sustaining farm where those who could not find work in the cities would be sent to give them the needed training to survive off the land. The third was a location in one of the British colonies where graduates of the farm colony could go to establish themselves.

All three colonies emphasized moving people to self-sufficiency and moral living. This was not charity, nor was it meant to create a cycle of dependence. Social Salvation came not just in helping people improve their standard of living, but in equipping people to sustain that higher standard of living so they could become contributing members of society.

All three colonies also included opportunities for people to become "soundly converted," as Booth described it. This meant that they were evangelized with the gospel so they could receive Eternal Salvation. However, he made it clear that there would be no coercion for anyone to accept the Christian faith, much less join the Salvation Army. The door would be open for this, but no one would be pushed through it.

But no compulsion will for a moment be allowed with respect to religion. The man who professes to love and serve God will be helped because of such profession, and the man who does not will be helped in the hope that he will, sooner or later, in gratitude to God, do the same; but there will be no melancholy

⁴¹ Ibid, 36.

⁴² Ibid, 165.

misery-making for any. There is no sanctimonious long face in the Army. We talk freely about Salvation, because it is to us the very light and joy of our existence. We are happy, and we wish others to share our joy. We know by our own experience that life is a very different thing when we have found the peace of God, and are working together with Him for the salvation of the world, instead of toiling for the realisation of worldly ambition or the amassing of earthly gain.⁴³

A critique of Booth can be levied here. Booth's careful delineation between the efforts made for Social Salvation and Eternal Salvation created a substantial barrier for people to begin the process of growing into discipleship. For Booth, it was all or nothing. Either a person came in and was saved socially and then went on his or her way, or the person was eternally saved and became a soldier in the Salvation Army, with the extensive set of requirements that entailed. There was no intermediate step.

In time, this lack of a structure to nurture people into the Christian faith would lead the Salvation Army to bifurcate its efforts, separating out its work for Social Salvation from its work for Eternal Salvation. More than this, the relatively few people who make the move from seeking social aid to seeking eternal aid has led the Salvation Army to emphasize meeting people's SoL concerns rather than inviting them into Eternal Salvation.⁴⁴ Still, during his life Booth was convinced that his work toward Social Salvation would go hand-in-hand with creating the environment in which Eternal Salvation occurred.

One way that Booth tried to keep the balance between the call to Social Salvation and the call to Eternal Salvation was by staying focused on the needs of individuals. His primary concern was to see individuals better situated in this life and converted for the next.

This is not to say that he was unaware or unopinionated about the social structure in England during his life. He argued that the political economy created an environment that was contrary to leading people to Eternal Salvation, so the need for his colonies was even greater to counteract that:

This Scheme removes the all but insuperable barrier to an industrious and godly life. It means not only the leading of these lost multitudes out of the "City of Destruction" into the Canaan of plenty, but the lifting of them up to the same level of advantage with the more favoured of mankind for securing the salvation of their souls. Look at the circumstances of hundreds and thousands of the classes of whom we are speaking. From the cradle to the grave, might not their influence in the direction of Religious Belief be summarised in one sentence, "Atheism made easy." Let my readers imagine theirs to have been a similar lot. Is it not possible that, under such circumstances, they might have entertained some serious doubts as to the existence of a benevolent God who would thus allow His creatures to

⁴³ Ibid, 110.

⁴⁴ The Salvation Army website <<https://www.salvationarmyusa.org/usn/>> demonstrates this, placing the work of the Salvation Army to meet SoL needs front and center, and minimizing evangelism. Even where it does describe evangelism, it does so as something that helps people deal with SoL issues rather than as a way to invite people into eternal salvation.

starve, or that they would have been so preoccupied with their temporal miseries as to have no heart for any concern about the next life?⁴⁵

Even with his stinging indictment against the existing social systems of his day, Booth made it clear that he was not interested in overhauling those systems. He agreed that such a renovation was necessary, but the immediate need for those living in “darkest England” to experience both salvations demanded attention first. As he explained:

[N]o one may say I am blind to the necessity of going further and adopting wider plans of operation than those which I put forward in this book. The renovation of our Social System is a work so vast that no one of us, nor all of us put together, can define all the measures that will have to be taken...All that we can do is to attack, in a serious, practical spirit the worst and most pressing evils, knowing that if we do our duty we obey the voice of God. He is the Captain of our Salvation. If we but follow where He leads we shall not want for marching orders, nor need we imagine that He will narrow the field of operations.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Booth, 256-257.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 43-44.



Fig. 1: A visual rendering of General Booth's Three Colony scheme to aid those lost in Darkest England. This chart accompanied his book. The lighthouse in the center signifies Salvation, though it is unclear whether it is Social or Eternal. The activities depicted all deal with SoL.

This is why Booth stands as the exemplar of the third description of how evangelism and SoL relate to one another. He claimed improving people's SoL was a necessary precursor for evangelism, with the desired outcome for people to be saved both socially and spiritually. His unwillingness to move beyond evangelizing individuals, however, kept him from being in the fourth or fifth categories. To see those categories enacted, we turn back to the Wesleyan Methodist Church.

The Forward Movement and Saving the Nation

In 1865, as William Booth was founding the Christian Mission after having broken ties with Methodist New Connexion, an eighteen-year-old named Hugh Price Hughes had just been approved for candidacy in the Wesleyan Methodist Church and was entering Richmond College in preparation to become an itinerating minister. At this time, Hughes was conservative in both his politics and theology. Nineteen years later, Hughes would be appointed as the superintendent and minister to Brixton Hill in London espousing very different opinions.⁴⁷

The conservative ideas Hughes held to in his early years agreed with the positions asserted by the Wesleyan Methodist Church as influenced by Bunting.⁴⁸ His view of how evangelism related to improving people's SoL was deeply influenced by foreign missions, and so would have been in the second description, holding that the church should reach out to people, but then expect people to come into the church to be converted. He believed this so strongly that he drew the ire of a tutor at Richmond when he gave a speech demanding that students being educated for the home and foreign fields should not be separated (as they then were in the college).⁴⁹ Hughes also agreed with Bunting that such evangelism should be done in a way that was decent and in order, not through revivals.⁵⁰

In the same speech at Richmond, though, Hughes demonstrated that he was able to think beyond this conservative approach to evangelism. While advocating to bring the home and foreign ministers together, he also suggested that Methodism could reshape the world.⁵¹ In other words, he recognized that evangelism could be a practice that not only transformed individuals but entire nations. This hints that he was already on a path that would take him to the fourth description in relating evangelism to improving people's SoL.

It was Hughes' experiences as an itinerant pastor that would tip him over to this broader thinking about evangelism. His first appointment in Dover had an especially strong impact on him, challenging some of his core beliefs. Despite his earlier misgivings about revivals, Hughes found that the people in Dover stood in need of being revived spiritually. More than this, he found that he was gifted to preach in an evangelistic way that stoked such revival. His first Sunday at Dover saw eighteen people come to faith.⁵² While pleased with this, it seems that Hughes may have had some lingering notions that revivalism was not an appropriate way to share the gospel. One of

⁴⁷ Edward Norman, *The Victorian Christian Socialists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), ch. 8.

⁴⁸ Oldstone-Moore, 22.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 26.

⁵⁰ Walters, 43.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 26.

⁵² Norman, 147-148, 160; Bebbington, *Nonconformist Conscience*, 13.

his earliest biographers observed that “Mr. Hughes was just as surprised at [the response to his preaching] as everybody else.”⁵³ Notwithstanding, to whatever extent he still held to the staid version of evangelism Bunting had championed, his experience in Dover persuaded him that revivalism was acceptable because of the clear need people had for hearing the message in this way.⁵⁴

In addition to having his view of evangelism revised, Hughes suddenly found himself dealing with issues of SoL when he came face-to-face with the impact of alcohol in Dover. Able to see three public houses from his study window, he “was not slow in discerning that drink formed one of the most effective barriers to his work.”⁵⁵ In realizing this, he came to the same conclusion as William Booth. However, Hughes took a step beyond Booth. Not only did Hughes believe alcohol ravaged the individuals who drank, but he concluded that it poisoned the society as a whole. This led him to begin advocating for temperance, something he had eschewed in previous years.⁵⁶

Based on these experiences, Hughes developed a three-part approach to Christian ministry, declaring that it had to relate to the individual, the social, and the religious. By this, he meant that it had to work toward transforming individuals' moral lives, making social structures more just so that they would provide for better SoL for all people, and offering eternal salvation for all. If Christians would share the gospel in a way that touched all three of these spheres, God would use them to bring about the transformation of entire towns, and even of the world.⁵⁷

This idea of Christianity as a world-changing engine caused Hughes to develop a view of evangelism that understood improving people's SoL as an evangelistic act itself. This was unlike Bunting, who saw SoL either as something people had to improve themselves in order to convert and access divine joy through the church (if they were in a Christian land) or as a matter indifferent to evangelism (in foreign missions). It was also a step beyond Booth who saw Christians improving people's SoL as a precursor that opened the door for people to hear the gospel and receive Eternal Salvation. For Hughes, a transformed nation was a desired outcome of the church's ministrations. This meant that social engagement to improve people's SoL and advocate for a more just nation was an evangelistic act because it moved people toward the broad view of salvation he envisioned.

Hughes sharpened his focus on how to practice this new approach to evangelism vis-à-vis SoL when he espoused Christian Socialism. This was a school of thought that maintained “Christianity had been too narrow in its excessive emphasis on personal sin to the neglect of social policy.”⁵⁸ It advocated for the church to become directly involved in politics and economics, taking a stand on behalf of the poor.

⁵³ Arthur Walters, *Hugh Price Hughes: Pioneer and Reformer* (London: Robert Culley, 1907), 46-47.

⁵⁴ Oldstone-Moore, 30.

⁵⁵ Walters, 47.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Oldstone-Moore, 29.

⁵⁸ Oldstone-Moore, 112.

Hughes was prompted to Christian Socialism after reading *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London* by the Congregational minister Andrew Mearns. Published in 1883, this short book introduced the upper and middle classes to the misery that industrial capitalism had wrought on the lower classes in England. It also emphasized the moral and spiritual degradation of the poor in a way that especially called the churches to respond. Mearns went so far as to suggest that the churches were partly to blame for not being active enough in reaching out to the poor:

Whilst we have been building our churches and solacing ourselves with our religion and dreaming that the millennium was coming, the poor have been growing poorer, the wretched more miserable, and the immoral more corrupt; the gulf has been daily widening which separates the lowest classes of the community from our churches and chapels, and from all decency and civilization.⁵⁹

This text sent a jolt through the Wesleyan Methodist Church, even prompting the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* to dedicate most of a volume to it. The leading article set a Christian Socialist tone, stating that the problem was too vast for the church to tackle alone. It required the church to engage with the larger social power brokers, especially the national government. "It is to the Government we must look, in the first place, for help," wrote the author, laying out ways that the government could use its power to appoint sanitary inspectors, condemn uninhabitable slum houses, and create an atmosphere in which people could expect a decent standard of living so they did not have to turn to Communism.⁶⁰

Hughes harnessed the distress that *The Bitter Cry* generated to take the Wesleyan Methodist Church in a new direction that would become known as the Forward Movement. This movement has been interpreted in various ways by historians, but was best defined by Hughes biographer Christopher Oldstone-Moore. He contended that the Forward Movement was an attempt by Hughes to lift the Wesleyan Methodist Church to the level of the Established Church in England by claiming "responsibility for the spiritual and social well-being of the people of all regions and classes, and serving as the organized conscience of the state."⁶¹ According to Oldstone-More, Hughes worked for this by 1) leading the Connexion to establish the West London Mission where evangelism could be performed in the city, 2) advocating for a Christian conscience for national policy, 3) reforming the structure of the Wesleyan Methodist Church itself to make it more democratic and more effective evangelistically, and 4) articulating a new social theology.⁶²

This agenda for the Forward Movement allowed Hughes' ideas about relating evangelism to improving people's SoL to take final form. For Hughes, the two activities were of a piece. As critical as it was to invite people to salvation through belief in Jesus Christ, it was just as critical to work with the government to develop an excellent SoL for all people. These two practices could not be separated because they both pointed toward a common outcome: a sanctified nation.

⁵⁹ Andrew Mearns, *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London: An Inquiry into the Condition of the Abject Poor* (London: James Clarke & Co, 1883), 4.

⁶⁰ "Outcast London; or, Wealth, Want, and Crime" 40-49, 131-136, *The Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, v. 107, 1884, 133-134.

⁶¹ Oldstone-Moore, 137.

⁶² *Ibid*, 138.

The state itself would be holy, working with the church to create an environment in which Christian virtue and a high SoL were available to all.

Hughes made this desire clear in four volumes of sermons that he published over the course of the following fifteen years. In the introduction of one volume entitled *Social Christianity*, he explained:

We have practically neglected the fact that Christ came to save the Nation as well as the Individual, and that it is an essential feature of His mission to reconstruct human society on a basis of Justice and Love. It has been well said that “the power of love as the basis of the State has not yet been tried.” But Christ rose from the dead to try it, and to do it.⁶³

In his first sermon in this volume, “Jesus Christ and Social Distress,” Hughes replied to a letter chastising him for diluting the gospel by preaching about social responsibility. According to the author of the letter, it would have been better for Hughes to endeavor to save souls. In his reply to this letter, he articulated his broadened view of evangelism encompassing the need for the church to work with the government to improve people's SoL.

I have long been persuaded that the reason why the masses of the people have to so great an extent failed to realize that their best friend is Jesus Christ, is the fact that we ministers of religion have taken the very course which my excellent correspondent urged upon me last Monday. We have dealt too exclusively with the individual aspect of the Christian faith. We have constantly acted as if Christianity had nothing to do with business, with pleasure, and with politics; as if it were simply a question of private life and prayer-meetings. It is because the spirit of Christ has not been introduced into public life that Europe is in perilous condition to-day.⁶⁴

The gospel his correspondent suggested Hughes preach was truncated and, as such, insufficient to bring anyone to salvation. More than that, the correspondent's view of human beings was also lacking.

The gentleman who wrote me, I may here mention, talked throughout his letter about “souls,” “dealing with souls,” “saving souls,” and so on. I might have settled the matter by saying that I had no disembodied “souls” in my congregation, but that I had souls incarnate, souls attached to bodies, and that we must deal with man as a complex being. If I had a congregation of disembodied souls who had no physical wants and no connection with London, I might take a very different course. But there is too much truth in the saying I have often quoted of late that “some very earnest Christians are so diligently engaged in saving *souls* that they have no time to save *men* and *women*.”⁶⁵

⁶³ Hugh Price Hughes, *Social Christianity: Sermons Delivered in St. James Hall, London* [4th edition] (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1890), viii.

⁶⁴ Hughes, *Social Christianity*, 22.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 26-27. Emphasis original.

Having laid this groundwork, Hughes became acerbic and suggested that those who only desire to save souls apart from also seeking to improve people's SoL through working for social transformation are even anti-Christmas!

I should like to know, indeed, what is the "good news" of the Gospel? Is it selfish individualism? I emphatically deny it. This afternoon we had occasion to refer to the song with which the angels from heaven saluted the birth of Christ. They sang of "Peace on earth, goodwill among men." They evidently thought Christ had come into this world to reconcile Labour and Capital; and to induce foolish and selfish nations to lay aside their weapons of violence and to dwell together in peace and brotherly love. If my excellent friend who wrote to me on Monday had been with the shepherds on that occasion, he would doubtless have rebuked the angels for referring to "Peace on earth" instead of saying something about souls.⁶⁶

In later sermons, Hughes laid out the scriptural and historical reasoning for his claims that the Christian Church must avoid promulgating a gospel that only involves saving souls and become an advisor to the government in developing a just society that cares for the poor. Above all, he argued the church must do these things because only the Christian Church demanded that people see one another as equals.

Since the Bible taught that all were created equally by God, Hughes contended, the church should advocate that all people should treat one another equally. This ethical claim had already generated great good, and it would be the cornerstone to building a perfected civilization. He explained this in a sermon entitled "Christ the Greatest of Social Reformers."

We have laid our finger upon the gaping sore of human society. Let us once realize the sacredness of every human being, however poor, however ignorant, however degraded, and tyranny becomes impossible, lust becomes impossible, war becomes impossible. This is the new idea which Jesus Christ introduced into human society. This is the new idea which will ultimately revolutionize human society. It has already given slavery its deathblow. It was not any discovery on the part of political economists that destroyed slavery. It was the discovery that every slave was a man and a brother. Then down went slavery.⁶⁷

The problem is not that the Christian faith is without the wisdom and power to bring about this sort of transformation. It is that Christians lack the vision to see what God can do if they will just act in accordance to the fullness of the gospel. Hughes made this point in the sermon "The Christian Imagination" in a later volume of sermons entitled *Ethical Christianity*, writing "There is nothing which ordinary Christians lack so much as this inspired imagination. They do not see visions. They do not dream dreams... Their dull, undeveloped souls have not realized the divine possibilities."⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Ibid, 28-29.

⁶⁷ Hughes, 62.

⁶⁸ Hugh Price Hughes, *Ethical Christianity* (London: S. Low, Marston & Company, limited, 1892), 39.

He went on to state that there were two points on which Christians were particularly unimaginative: 1) in reference to evangelism and the church and 2) in reference to the state and justice for the poor. In relation to the church, he wrote:

The ordinary Christian, with his unsanctified imagination, is not perturbed by a half-empty sanctuary, or by a Christian Church that is more dead than alive. He has no enterprise. He has no enthusiasm. He holds that as it was in the beginning, or is now, so it must be for ever and ever. He is indignant with his brother-Christian whose imagination enables him to realize a spiritual prosperity yet attained. The imaginative Christian sees the sanctuary crowded with healthy, happy, united Christians. He sees all the great revivals and spiritual miracles of the past repeated under his eyes. The unimaginative Christian is affronted by such visions. He regards the man who cherishes them as a dangerous "visionary," a foolish "fanatic," a reckless "enthusiast." The real difference between these two men is not that one is a Christian and the other is not; but that one has the eyes of his imagination opened, while the other is still blind.⁶⁹

Immediately after this, he called for greater vision in relation to social life and SoL:

Again, in civic life the ordinary Christian citizen is well satisfied if he discharges his own commonplace duties to the rate-collector and to the municipal authorities. But the Christian citizen whose imagination is inspired of God dreams of social changes which would make it as easy for his fellow-citizens to do right as it now is for them to do wrong... There is no sphere of life in which there is more scope for the imagination than in civic life. Only at present there is no sphere in which it is so little exercised. Nothing could be more dull, narrow, and brutish than the ordinary conception of municipal life in our great towns. Only here and there do municipal authorities begin to realize how much could easily and cheaply be done to beautify life, to ennoble it, to instruct and inspire it; and, on the other hand, to repress both hideousness and vileness. Some day Christians will see visions and dream dreams of a noble and glorious citizenship. Then the voice of complaining will no longer be heard in our streets.⁷⁰

Throughout the rest of the sermons in this collection, Hughes explicitly tied the gospel to working for social transformation. He argued that the work of Christ in the Resurrection was the assurance that all the social evils besetting humanity, which he identified as "Drunkenness, Lust, Slavery, Ignorance, Gambling, Pauperism, Disease, Crime, and War," were "marked for destruction as a woodman marks the trees that are to be cut down."⁷¹

In making these claims, Hughes recognized William Booth as a brother in this work. Alluding to Booth's *Out of Darkest England*, Hughes expostulated, "What a dream of social reform has come to General Booth in his old age! That veteran of the faith imagines social arrangements

⁶⁹ Ibid, 39-40.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 40.

⁷¹ Ibid, 75-76.

which will abolish pauperism, and all the world wonders.”⁷² He later wrote along the same lines, “When General Booth in his old age conceives the vision of a magnificent plan for abolishing pauperism, it is received with admiration and gratitude in the most unexpected quarters.”⁷³

This admiration reflected the similar temperament held by both Hughes and Booth. Both saw a serious need, and both dedicated all their powers to address it in the name of Christ. This did not mean they agreed on everything though. In another sermon, Hughes hedged his approval of how Booth organized the Salvation Army by writing “I do not say that we can all approve of the principle in the precise form in which it exists in the Salvation Army.” Nonetheless, Hughes went on to praise Booth's work highly:

General Booth has made the same great discovery that Oliver Cromwell made at a crisis in our national history. There was endless talking, and committees were perpetually sitting and wrangling and doing nothing. It was high time that some strong and devoted man should take the matter into his own hands and invite his fellow-Christians to submit themselves willingly to authority, in order that organized co-operation might effect what lawless individualism, however sincere and however enthusiastic, was absolutely impotent to achieve.⁷⁴

While Booth did not advocate for social transformation the way Hughes did, contenting himself to lay out a plan to meet the immediate needs of the “residents of darkest England,” Hughes was still grateful for someone who was pushing for a grand program that would not allow either the church or the state to remain at status quo. Hughes would happily link arms with Booth as Booth worked to overcome the immediate needs and Hughes worked to reform the entire nation, with both seeing their work as evangelistic because they sought to save people both in this life and the next.

An Unexpected Consequence

Hughes was not content only to work within the church given his broader view of evangelism. Putting into practice what he preached, he became a political advocate of the first order by launching the *Methodist Times* and leading Sunday evening meetings at St. James where he would discuss the social problems of the day. Through these two vehicles, he sought to bring the full moral force of the Wesleyan Methodist Church, and of the Non-Conformist Churches generally, to bear in shaping social policy. His chief aim in these activities was to help Liberal politicians get elected who supported reforming the political economy in a way that fit with the ethical call for humans to treat each other equally.⁷⁵

What is essential to remember when looking at Hughes participating in these activities is that he saw them as extensions of his evangelistic work. This is because the outcome he sought from evangelism was not simply individual salvation, nor even individuals being saved and having a better SoL, but of individuals receiving both these blessings because they lived within a

⁷² Ibid, 40.

⁷³ Ibid, 171.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 87.

⁷⁵ Norman, 159-161.

sanctified nation. As such, he could expand what he considered evangelism to entail working for people to have improved SoL within a transformed nation.

Initially, it seemed that Hughes and those who engaged in similar social and political agitation had been successful. As the British parliament shifted to become more Liberal during the first decade of the twentieth century, it agreed to develop a more just society for the poor and working classes.⁷⁶ However, there were two reasons why this success would be fleeting.

First, much of what moved Britain toward the left had to do with political expediency, not Christian witness.⁷⁷ Hughes may have seen socialist policies as an extension of evangelistic efforts to draw people into the victory of Christ's resurrection, but it was the social unrest during the early twentieth century that forced parliament to act more than any ecclesial advocacy. As such, it is important not to overestimate the impact of Hughes' efforts.

Second, while Hughes advocated for governmental activity on behalf of the poor based on the ethics that arose from both a Christian cosmology and eschatology, the British Parliament did not. Dealing with social unrest was a matter of national security. Especially with the rising power of a unified Germany, England could not afford to be wracked by internal strife.⁷⁸ While there were likely some MPs who backed a Liberal social agenda because of their Christian faith, the overall movement in this direction was powered by pragmatism.

This would have been unexpected for Hughes, and likely unwelcome. Although one can only speculate on how he would have responded to this, since he died in 1902, we have some indication from how he became a ringleader for the ouster of Charles Stewart Parnell. Parnell was an Irish MP who supported a Liberal agenda in parliament whose affair with a married woman became public knowledge in 1890. In spite of Parnell's powerful leadership in favor of Liberalism, Hughes became the public voice of the "nonconformist conscience" demanding that Parnell be removed from Liberal leadership.⁷⁹ For Hughes, a morally tainted MP was as unfit to do the work of God in transforming the state as an MP that refused to help the poor.

Given this, it is likely that Hughes would have been troubled by the pragmatism driving the Liberal agenda in the 1910s, with such people as Winston Churchill stepping forward as emerging flagbearers for the party. Whereas during his life Hughes had thought the church was too focused on a privatized gospel and not enough on a social agenda, he might have concluded the pendulum had swung too far in the other direction by the early 1900s when the church did not hold impious MPs to account. Perhaps Hughes would have emphasized the need to call people to Christ for personal salvation and sanctification if he had lived for another two decades.

⁷⁶ Alan Sykes, *The Rise and Fall of British Liberalism, 1776-1988* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 154-161.

⁷⁷ William D. Rubinstein, *Twentieth-Century Britain: A Political History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 3.

⁷⁸ Harry Cocks, "Modernity and Modernism," and Max Jones, "War and National Identity Since 1914," in *20th Century Britain: Economic, Cultural and Social Change*, ed. by Francesca Carnevali and Julie-Marie Strange, second edition (New York: Routledge, 2014), chs. 3, 6.

⁷⁹ Robert Pope, "The Nonconformist Conscience," in *T&T Clark Companion to Nonconformity*, ed. by Robert Pope (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 437.

There is an irony here. By holding up the vision of a transformed nation as the primary outcome of evangelism, and by therefore extending the practice of evangelism to entail advocating for people to have an improved SoL, Hughes had been a factor in the pendulum swinging. Whereas the church could be a provocateur toward a Conservative parliament, taking the role of the prophetic visionary demanding justice for all people and pushing MPs toward caring for the poor in the name of God, the church could only become a chaplain that supported a Liberal government that agreed on the need to care for the poor. The church might challenge the morality and spirituality of the Liberals, as Hughes did with Parnell, but trying to walk the line of evangelizing both spiritually and socially is hard to do. Would the church really want to be a prophetic gadfly agitating for personal morality among the MPs when it saw them otherwise supporting their agenda on a systemic level? It would be easier to see the will of God being accomplished through the government and to wink at the moral and spiritual failings of the MPs.

So it is that Hughes and his Forward Movement first expanded, then shrank, the practice of evangelism. They expanded it to involve both preaching the gospel and pushing the government to improve people's SoL, and they shrank it by having the church essentially cede the work of improving people's SoL to the state, thereby giving up their spiritual call to salvation in order to serve as a chaplain to the Liberal government. As Oldstone-Moore observed:

To the extent that Methodist missions broke new ground in social work and set an example for the state, and to the extent that so many Methodists provided leadership for the labour movement, it might be said that Methodist decline was a function of its success. Hughes's real intention was that both workers and politics be Christianized simultaneously, and thus bound together in righteousness, and it was this goal that was unrealized... Hughes's conversion appeal, founded upon personal responsibility to God and to society, and an audacious expectation of a righteous nation, was less convincing in a more atomized and democratized society in which the individual was relatively less significant, moral assurance more difficult, and direct personal responsibility less easy to determine.⁸⁰

This outcome from Hughes's work means that he unintentionally laid the foundation for the fifth description of how evangelism and SoL relate to one another. In this approach, the state is the primary actor that works for an improved SoL with the church helping as it can. The outcome is simply that people have an improved SoL. There is no spiritual or eternal quality to this work. God, it is believed, is satisfied with people living well on earth.

The Sacrilization of Evangelism

In reviewing the history of Methodist and Methodist-related leaders from the nineteenth century in England, five clear approaches are visible that the church can take in how it relates evangelism to improving people's SoL. These are laid out in the descriptions presented at the beginning of the paper:

⁸⁰ Oldstone-Moore, 335.

Relationship of Improving SoL to Evangelism	Hoped for Outcome	Methodist Example
Improved SoL a requirement for being evangelized – people improve themselves	Conversion/civilization of those evangelized and a respectable institutional church	Jabez Bunting and Home Missions
Evangelize people of all SoLs in their specific contexts – church converts, does not improve	Conversion/civilization of those evangelized and a respectable institutional church	1. Jabez Bunting and Foreign Missions 2. Early William Booth 3. Early Hugh Price Hughes
Church improves SoL as precursor to verbal evangelism	Conversion and a better life for those evangelized	William Booth and Salvation Army
Church improves SoL as an act of evangelism	Transformed/holy society	Hugh Price Hughes and Forward Mvmt
State works with church to enact justice – church is chaplain	Improved SoL for all people	Secularity from Forward Mvmt

The first two approaches are visible in the thinking of Jabez Bunting. William Booth represents a shift from the second to the third approach. Hugh Price Hughes paved the way for the fourth and fifth approaches. As shown in these descriptions, the primary reason for the differences among these three men’s perspectives, and the practices of the movements that followed them, was the respective outcomes each desired from the church’s evangelistic ministries.

For Bunting, the outcome he most desired was developing a respectable institutional church. As a result, a person needed to improve his or her SoL to be worthy of entering into the church and be converted. Then one could partake in the sublime joy of heaven. The only exception to this was in foreign missions, when a person was in a land where they could not be expected to know they needed to improve themselves prior to entering the church. In such a case, the church needed to offer the gospel first. While this was done in a way that was indifferent to the person’s SoL, the expectation still was that the recipients of such evangelism would be inspired to improve themselves in order to participate more fully in the respectable work of the church. In both cases, the primary outcome was that the church’s respectability was maintained or heightened in order to continue attracting people to itself.

Booth rejected the idea that the outcome of evangelism should be focused on the church. Rather, he desired personal conversion by preaching the gospel to people, especially the poor, in the midst of their need. He expanded on what he believed the outcome should be after encountering the severity of poverty in London, declaring that people needed both Eternal Salvation and Social Salvation; both conversion and a better SoL. To accomplish this, he and the Salvation Army embarked on a plan of ministry to provide both. They would start by improving people’s SoL through meeting their immediate physical needs, then they would share the gospel verbally.

Booth believed that this order of presentation was essential because the poor could not hear the gospel unless their SoL was sufficiently improved to give them the capacity to consider eternal things. As such, improving people's SoL was a necessary precursor to evangelism.

For Hughes, the desired outcome was a transformed society, made holy by the sanctifying influence of the Christian faith in the individual, social and religious spheres. The individual was offered eternal joy through faith in Christ, the entire society was offered a sanctified existence in which all people would be offered a good SoL, and the church was an essential institution that taught the ethical implications of the gospel in the public square. The church took some direct responsibility for improving people's SoL as part of this ministry, but primarily advocated for the state to take on this work through establishing a more just political economy. Regardless, whether preaching the gospel to individuals, improving people's SoL directly, or advocating for the state to improve it, all was part of the evangelistic work leading to the transformed society.

Hughes unintentionally also led to the diminishment of evangelism. By emphasizing the outcome being a sanctified state that allowed everyone to have a good SoL, he set up a situation in which the church would hand over its evangelistic work of improving people's SoL to the government. This is exactly what happened in England in the early twentieth century, with the church receding in its efforts as Liberals took control of parliament. While handing over this aspect of the church's evangelistic work did not mean that the church also had to end its evangelism aimed at saving people eternally, what Hughes did not foresee was that the state could care for the poor without also being convinced of the need to honor Jesus Christ as Lord. Political pragmatism proved to be just as successful a motivator as the gospel. As a result, the church accepted a minimized role in the public square behind the government and largely let go of its call to eternal salvation in order to support the government with minimal friction between the two institutions. To do this, the church tailored its desired outcome to fit the work of the state. Thus, the last description was forged in which the church only desires people to have an improved SoL provided by the state with no spiritual or moral aspect added to that.

Recognizing these five approaches of how to relate evangelism to improving SoL should be instructive for present day churches in three ways. First, it shows this relationship should not be essentialized. All five of the approaches arose as a result of theological reflections of the people who advocated them based on their historical setting. Like all streams of theology, they were meant to address a particular set of concerns at a particular period of time in a particular place. They were not meant to be eternal proclamations for how the church should practice evangelism at all times. We should likewise avoid arguing that a single approach is absolutely right, but recognize that the approach we take may need to shift according to our context.

Second, the desired outcome from our evangelism is the most important determinant for how we incorporate improving people's SoL into our evangelistic outreach. Depending on if a congregation believes God is more concerned with eternal things, future things, present things, or physical things, that congregation will be nudged toward a particular way of incorporating improving people's SoL into its practice of evangelism. Put simply, congregations will tailor their means to achieve their desired end.

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Third, balance is essential. Each of the historical examples we presented gives us the benefit of seeing what happened when it was taken too far in a particular direction. For Bunting, the emphasis on making the church a respectable institution left the Wesleyan Methodists cold and uncaring toward the poor. This is not to say that we should not desire to grow numerically or ignore the institutional aspects of the church, but that becoming bogged down with these concerns will cause us to lose our love of neighbor.

Booth sought to balance Social Salvation with Eternal Salvation by caring for people's SoL as a precursor to verbal evangelism. While this was effective in reaching the poor, it also set the bar too high for many people to become disciples of Jesus Christ. Only those who were ready to make the substantial step from being a recipient of a better SoL to being a soldier in the Salvation Army could pursue growth in discipleship. Booth did not want anyone to feel coerced, and so settled for the Salvation Army focusing on people's physical needs. This would effectively truncate many people's growth in grace by not providing intermediate steps for them to move from conversion to such regimented discipline.

Finally, Hughes wanted to balance an enormous amount, holding together all the activities needed to bring about individual salvation and the salvation of an entire nation through the reform of a political economic system. The need to collaborate with other entities, especially the government, led this huge endeavor to collapse. The church ultimately gave over its concerns about spiritual and moral salvation in order to support the Liberal Party's efforts at improving people's SoL.

These observations should give congregations today caution in building their evangelistic ministries as they relate to improving others' SoL. No approach is perfect, and no approach can be settled once and for all. Rather, each congregation must engage in a continual process of reflecting on the political, economic, and social context in which they are set, and lay those up against the ultimate goal they believe God has for people's salvation. The result of this will guide them in enacting their evangelistic practices until either a change in their context or a change in their theology necessitates a shift.