

## Redemptive Theology of Salvation

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*“I am ceaselessly torn between the perfection of God and the misery of man.” (Simone Weil)*

*“Holy solitaries is a phrase no more consistent with the gospel than holy adulterers. The gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness but social holiness. Faith working in love is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection.” (John Wesley)*

*“I expect that we exclude Lazarus because we are frightened that our hearts will be touched if we enter into relationship with him. If we listen to his story and hear his cry of pain we will discover that he is a human being. We might be touched by his broken heart and his misfortunes. What happens when our hearts are touched? We might want to do something to comfort and help him, to alleviate his pain, and where will that leave us? As we enter into dialogue with the beggar, we risk entering into an adventure. Because Lazarus needs not only money but a place to stay, medical treatment, maybe work, and even more, he needs friendship. That is why it is dangerous to enter into relationship with the Lazaruses of our world. If we do we risk our lives being changed.” (Jean Vanier, *Becoming Human*)*

### Introduction

I have been working within Toronto’s homeless community for over 14 years. Currently I am the director of the Salvation Army Gateway, a 108-bed shelter for homeless men as well as a drop-in centre for men and women. During my time among very vulnerable people, I have met countless individuals who have challenged my thinking on most topics.

I have wondered why a homeless shelter exists in the heart of one of North America’s most prosperous cities. I have agonized over the fact that so many Canadian have no home. I have attended and presided over countless

funerals of men and women who have died alone on the streets.

I have often come home from a long day at work and turned on the 6 o’clock news hoping to relax and get caught up on the day’s news. When the commercials come to break up the news, they try to convince me that, in order to be successful, I must have the latest SUV and I have to use the “best” shampoo. By the time we get through a one-hour news broadcast, it’s easy to see why we are afraid of others and determined to earn more money so we can buy more stuff.

It is obvious to me that our culture is broken. There are strong links between the way our culture teaches us to think and the fact that there are many broken families, that people are living and dying on our streets, that the environment is rapidly being destroyed, and that the church is shrinking.

We need God. We need to be saved.

### Salvation

Salvation is not simple. The word salvation literally means the saving of somebody or something from harm, destruction, difficulty or failure. The standard evangelical understanding of salvation is often too narrow. Many evangelicals are preoccupied with simply saving souls and see social concerns as a peripheral goal. They view social issues as a distraction from their mission.

Many who were raised in evangelical homes came to believe that salvation was all about us. We needed to be saved and we needed to be about the business of saving others. We learned about Heaven and Hell and saw these as consequences of our personal choices regarding Jesus. We essentially learned to fear not being saved almost more than we loved the Savior. Some of us developed a theology of salvation as a list of do’s and don’ts with a primary focus to save ourselves from Hell.

Many rebelled from this theology. Some left the faith altogether as a result of never knowing for sure if

they would burn in Hell or were good enough to go to Heaven. Some left the faith not caring if they went to Heaven because the church made it sound so boring that they would rather be a part of the party in Hell. And many stayed behind in the church, perpetuating this unhealthy understanding of salvation and attempting to pass it on.

### **A New Paradigm**

Thankfully, an international group of leading evangelicals gathered in Lausanne, Switzerland in 1974, discussed the relationship between social action and evangelism. They formulated the Lausanne covenant which included the following statement: "The Salvation we claim should be transforming us in the totality of our personal and social responsibilities." This statement was reaffirmed in Manila in 1989 when the statement of evangelicals read: "As we preach the Kingdom of God we must be committed to its demands of justice and peace."

Some were fortunate enough to know of this new way of thinking about salvation. Over time, we began to view salvation as not being merely individualistic. While it was necessary to know Jesus and to explore Him with others, we came to believe salvation was much bigger than that. Our role was not just to lead others towards individual Salvation but also to be about the redemption of structures. As followers of Christ, we need to seek shalom - to bring the world back to the way it was originally intended to be by the Creator. (Jeremiah 29:7)

As I read about the Founder of the Salvation Army, William Booth, and his evolving theology of Salvation, it became clear that he developed a new and broader understanding of salvation. While it is clear that he started his ministry with the single goal of saving souls, later in his ministry he realized that salvation had a social dimension as well.

He underwent what some called a second conversion. In 1889 he wrote an article called "Salvation for Both Worlds," in which he says: "Christ is the deliverer for time as truly as for eternity. He is the Joshua who leads men in our own day out of the wilderness into the Promised Land, as His forerunner did the children of Israel thousands of years ago. He is the Messiah who brings glad tidings! He is come to open the prison doors. He is come to set men free from their bonds. He is indeed the Saviour of the world!"

Booth feared that once this new two-fold mission of

The Salvation Army began, that some would forget the necessity of thinking about individual Salvation, and that the organization would just become another social agency. Clearly he was prophetic in his fears as many Christian social agencies, including some Salvation Army ones, have lost sight of the need to do all things in hopes of building and strengthening the Kingdom of God.

We must understand and pursue the twofold nature of Salvation that Booth embraced: One being the need to be about the business of seeking shalom for social structures, the other being the need to seek shalom for individuals, including ourselves.

### **Salvation and Structures**

There are five structures which we need to reconsider, in order to understand what might constitute 'shalom', the Creator's original intention for that structure. It is important to address these five areas of life when thinking about the salvation of social structures. These areas are: the church, environment, government, economy, community. Each of these needs to be saved, because they do not currently operate the way that the Creator intended for them. While I recognize that these five are by no means a comprehensive list, I think they adequately address many of the issues that we are facing today (every town, village, suburb or inner city faces the same issues when it comes to salvation. For my examples however, I will draw primarily on the inner city simply because it is my frame of reference).

### **Salvation of the church**

The local church is to be a microcosm of the universal church- a group of student-followers of Christ functioning as a body, ministering to and caring for one another and impacting the outside world (1 Cor.12:12-31).

The church has lost much of that identity. In many cases, it has evolved into a place where rules and doctrine have become the primary focus. Much of the church has transitioned into a social club where membership and protocol have become central and people achieve varying levels of significance based on committee, board or musical group.

The church has also lost its integrity. The church has been telling people they can have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ when many of its members do not have this relationship themselves. The church has been saying that we love the God of peace, when there is inner turmoil in our midst. It has been saying we worship the God of

love, when we can barely demonstrate love for each other inside the walls of our own churches.

Some denominations have been abusing children in their care. And the church has not spoken out against corrupt TV evangelists. We knew they were corrupt before the world did and did nothing about it. The church, for the most part, has been slow to deal with these sins.

Finally, the church has lost its spirituality. The world has not come to us for their spiritual needs. The church has lost much of its vitality and relevancy to the culture and to its people. We have a spiritual vacuum and therefore other spiritual forces have come in to take the church's place.

In Canada we see the devastating results of a loss of focus for the church. Many are struggling to simply remain open. In a 2003 Ipsos-Reid survey of Canadians, some eye-opening statistics regarding the church came to light. 44% of Canadians agree with the statement, "I have committed my life to Christ and consider myself to be a converted Christian." This number is an increase of 15% since 1993. However, fewer Canadians attend church regularly, down to 19%. 85% of all Canadians say that "*I don't think you need to attend church to be a good Christian.*" While we have been good at personal evangelism, we have lost the importance of living our faith as part of a community of believers.

What has caused this loss of identity for the church? There are many factors. In the past 50-60 years, the church has seen urbanization, globalization, consumerism, materialism, pluralism, individualism, mass media, to name a few.

However, these are mere symptoms of a deeper problem. The fact is, the church has taken its eyes off of the Saviour, and focused on other things. It has lost sight of Christ and made the church itself the focus. It has set up so many rules and focused so much on church growth and survival that it has lost sight of the Saviour of the world. The Holy Spirit will not move among the people of God when Christ is not the foundation of the church.

Throughout scripture we see that Christ builds the church in the power of His kingdom. He also proclaims the power of his Kingdom when He says "The Gates of Hell will not overcome it." (Matt.16:18) The church has been promised that if the house is built on the rock, it will stand up to anything that comes against it. (Matt.7:24-27) The church has not withstood the many obstacles it has faced throughout the years without becoming

damaged.

In the Old Testament we read of Solomon dedicating the temple to God and then building a shrine for Chemosh, the god of the Moabites, on the Mount of Olives directly above the temple. (1 Kings 11:7) "The Lord's judgments brought disaster as He poured out 'vengeance for the covenant' (Lv. 26:25)". In the same way, God is pouring out His vengeance on the church of today as we have bowed down to other gods.

One crucial way in which the church has lost its focus on Christ is by forgetting the twofold nature of Salvation. Much time, effort and resources have been spent in evangelical churches on trying to save souls with the most up to date methods and tools available. Many sermons are about how we should go out and invite our friends to our seeker friendly church services so that they would be saved. Very rarely do we hear sermons about the necessity of the social responsibility of the church. We need to care for the poor. Not just for their spiritual well-being, but for their physical needs as well.

A responsibility of the church, if we are to follow Christ's example, is not only to preach the good news, but to preach the good news especially to the poor. Jesus said: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." (Luke 4:18, 19)

The 1950's and 60's, with the advent of suburbs, shopping malls, and automobiles we saw the virtual evacuation of the church from the inner city. Evangelicals moved to the suburbs and the church followed behind out of a need to keep its doors open. People who remained in the inner city were those who could not afford homes in the suburbs and could not purchase a vehicle. These were mainly immigrants and refugees as well as the working poor. There were very few places left for the poor to attend church, and those that remained were highly ritualistic and irrelevant to that people group. This in turn left a spiritual vacuum in the downtown core and was another step towards 'ghettoizing' the inner city.

The church continued to flourish in suburban neighbourhoods with mainly middle to upper class white people attending the services in comfort. Over time, as very few poor folks could get to church even if they wanted to, the church lost sight of its mission to be among the poor. Ministries with an emphasis on caring for the poor

were often afterthoughts that were done with any leftover money that the church may have had.

Does the church need Shalom - to be redeemed to the way God intended it to be? The answer from my perspective is an overwhelming **yes**. The church should not expect a 'revival in the land' until it is willing to take seriously the plight of the poor. This is backed up countless times by scripture. "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world." (James 1:27) We also hear Jesus in the parable of the sheep and the goats making clear the black and white nature of the necessity to care for the poor. He concludes this parable by saying "I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me. Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life." (Matt. 25: 45, 46)

Fortunately, the church is showing glimpses of beginning to understand this. The church is not dead because God is not dead. While it may resemble the valley of the dry bones, it has much potential. With the power of the Holy Spirit it can become vibrant and healthy and can change the world. Ezekiel, at God's instruction, commanded "Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord" (Ez.37). Then the dry bones came to life and the people of God were revived and renewed (Ez.40-44). So too can today's remnant cry out to God to breathe fresh wind and new life into the church!

### **Salvation of the Environment**

The environment or creation, is another element that needs saving. The creator did not originally intend the earth to be in the condition it is in today. We have experienced global warming, the depletion of the ozone layer, acid rain, natural habitats being destroyed by land developers, genetic engineering, consumerism and materialism escalating out of control. These are examples of a lack of concern for the earth.

The God we worship is the creator of the world. To participate in the destruction of the creation and claim to worship the creator is hypocrisy. As Christians, if one of our goals is to model Christ-likeness, then we must begin to take seriously the condition of the environment. Some people are not interested in embracing Christ due to the poor example which followers of Jesus are setting environmentally.

It is important to first examine some Biblical texts which directly address the environmental issue. We should note three essential elements of the creation narrative in Genesis 1 and 2. First, creation has a diversity of creatures of every kind. Second, all of these living things, not just human beings, are good. (Gen. 1:31) Third, due to God's plan, we see that the diversity of creatures fit together harmoniously.

We see in many of the Psalms the fact that creation is sustained by God. (Psalm 104) All creatures are dependent on each other and are valuable, not because they can be useful to humans, but because they have value for each other and were created by God. "We (humans) are to cultivate the earth, but in harmony with the needs of other creatures and in such a way that all creation is enabled to sing praises to God the Creator, since the chief purpose of all creatures is to glorify God." (Ps.148).

This is not to say that we should not hunt or fish or cut down trees. However, it is to say that we do these things with respect for creation and with an understanding that creation is finite. We should only do things that are sustainable by creation. Once we begin to rape the earth of its natural resources and not worry about replacing them, we begin to destroy creation and offend the creator. We start to act as though we ourselves are God and that creation is meant for our benefit.

One example of the destruction of the environment has to do with our overuse of fossil fuels. An automobile will emit 5.6 pounds of carbon dioxide into the air for every gallon of gas it uses. While Carbon Dioxide is not considered a pollutant as it is a necessary ingredient of the earth's atmosphere, it still only needs .035% Carbon Dioxide to appropriately sustain life on earth. In the past 100 years, our engines and fires have released an enormous amount of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere that was originally buried beneath the earth's surface.

What can we do to slow this environmental decay down? We need to start to "do the right thing" when it comes to the environment. Simple things like recycling and reusing things help. We could compost our scraps to cut down on garbage. Maybe we don't have to use our air conditioners so much at summer time. Also, we can try walking or riding a bike to work or taking local transit rather than driving. If we have to drive, why not buy a used car rather than buying a new one thereby reducing the need to use more of the earth's natural resources to build another new car. Also, let's not buy into the myth that we need an SUV in order to get around the city.

These vehicles in and of themselves consume enormous amounts of fuel and contribute so much unnecessary Carbon Dioxide into the atmosphere. And finally, let's not get caught up in materialism and consumerism. We can purchase used clothing, household appliances, and even toys for our kids. Why can't we purchase a previously lived-in house rather than a new one? Why can't we purchase existing church buildings rather than building a new one?

Christians can view these simple activities as acts of worship. When we turn down our air conditioner, or ride our bike to work, or when we pick up a tin can at the local park and throw it in the recycling bin, we can do it in the name of Jesus. We can know that we have glorified the creator by caring for the creation.

### **Salvation of government**

According to James Forbes, one of the most profound preachers of our time, the only purpose of a city (or any society) is to provide for the well-being of all of its inhabitants. The role of government is to organize a society, set its rules and goals, and make decisions along the way in order to protect that society. If we agree that this is the way that God originally intended government to be, once again it is clear that much about government that needs to be saved.

In the 1960's, we began to witness severe institutional mistrust, including lack of trust for the government. People began to view the police as perhaps enemies and not friends. Stories developed linking politicians, police and organized crime. The Watergate scandal cemented mistrust of government and things have never been the same since.

Today we see much abuse of power. We see very wealthy men and women running for public office and winning because they had the most money to pour into their election campaigns. Smear campaigns when running for an election are the norm. We daily about scandals after on Parliament Hill or the White House or on Downing Street. We have become immune to hearing stories of this nature from all three levels of Canadian government as well as stories filtering through from south of the border.

Abuse of power and mistrust in government office is not new. The Old Testament is rampant with stories of government leaders using their power with little regard for the people. One Israelite King after another took all that they could for themselves and were incredibly

cruel to their people along the way. Many leaders saw their citizens as a means to an end for their own personal gain.

We can also see in these passages what can happen to a society when the leaders put their trust in God. Those judges and kings that knew they were merely servants of God and of their people were blessed. The people being led by someone who feared God experienced life where all of its people were cared for. What makes us think that this would be different today?

While it is not my intent to suggest solutions to this dilemma, I make two observations;

1. As leaders of government are human and therefore flawed, it is God's desire that they put their trust in Him and let themselves be guided by His will. Otherwise a misuse and abuse of power will surely occur.
2. As the role of government is to see that all of its inhabitants are well cared for, it needs to hear the voice of its entire people, including the poor.

Hear these words spoken by the prophet Isaiah: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over His Kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever." (Is.9: 6, 7)

This is the way that God originally intended for government to be and is the way it will be throughout eternity. It is not the way that it is today, however, so it is in need of salvation. Maybe Christians can be prophets of our time and speak to our leaders about their need to trust in God. Perhaps we can do more to hold our leaders accountable. And maybe some of us can run for public office and make some changes from the inside. We know that "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8: 31)

### **Salvation and the Eco**

Economics means knowing how things work and arranging these things so that the material requirements of the household are met. "The basic task of any economy, then, is *the continuation of life*, though no economist has put it that way for ages." Based on this definition of the economy, it is clear that it needs to be redeemed - it is not the way it was meant to be.

The most significant change to the economy has been "...to shift economic attention away from the household and its community to the firm or corporation. The founders of modern economics chose the corporation or firm rather than the household as the basic unit of economic agency." This shift has been tragic. Corporations see success in maximizing profits and increasing their market value with little concern for the household or its surrounding community.

We look at the economy as a measure of how well our community is doing. Why is it that the measure of a successful government is often about how well the economy is doing? Why is it that so many citizens live their lives glued to the numbers in the stock market? How has the economy become the centre of our thinking?

I remember turning on the radio after I had presided over the funeral of one of my street friends. I was in a melancholy space as I was devastated by the state of a society which allows people to die alone on our streets. The music was interrupted by a special news bulletin. Some important stock had crashed that day and the economy had taken another blow. People were up in arms. I was outraged. I had just buried my friend who died with no material possessions and all that people could care about was that the economy took a hit that day. It was reaffirmed in me that our societal priorities need a major adjustment.

I believe the market has become an idol of our society that people worship. As it is necessary to make sacrifices to an idol or a god, we too make sacrifices to the market. Our culture is decaying. Marriages and families are breaking down. Churches are empty. People are dying on our streets. The environment is being destroyed. And yet many people are totally fixated on the economy as though it were their saviour.

I have written a poem that I think captures the issue.

### **I wonder**

A man once said that the man who lives in hope  
dies starving  
A girl once told me she's so alone  
She sells her body to feel loved

I wonder what could have gone so wrong  
to be so wrong

Someone on Yonge Street begs for money  
to buy crack  
He says that when people give him money  
They put another nail in his coffin but he doesn't  
want to die

and I wonder what could have gone so wrong  
to be so wrong

The world spins away towards yesterday  
and we keep on worshipping money and sacrificing  
the weak to appease our god  
And only complain when the price of gas goes up or  
when our stocks go down

and I wonder what could have gone so wrong  
to be so wrong

What can be done to seek the shalom of the economy? Much has been written about the unequal distribution of wealth and the disparity between the rich and the poor. Jesus said, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in Heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matt.6:19-21) If followers of Christ could even grasp and put into practice these simple instructions, our world would be a much different place.

### **Salvation and Community**

People in true community share resources, and they share in each other's hopes, dreams and burdens. Community in the way that God intended it to be is one where people bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2), weep together, party and rejoice together (Romans 12:15), lift each other up in prayer (Romans 1:9; Phil. 1:4), and love each other as Christ has loved them (John 13:34).

Much of our culture has missed the essence of community. The concept of community is one that needs to be saved. An expert in the law asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbour?" (Luke. 10:29) The answer is the parable of the Good Samaritan, one that needs to be re-visited. Jesus also said in this conversation that the law is twofold: to love God with everything you have and to love your neighbour as yourself. (Luke 10:27)

People often ask me what the solution to

homelessness is. My answer is always that we need to get back to community. This is extremely oversimplified, but if individuals, the church, the government, and the corporate world all did their part in community, there would be no homelessness. People always want to point fingers but the bottom line is we all need to do our part in community. I run a shelter because there is a need for shelter beds. This need exists because people keep slipping through the cracks of their original community.

In the neighbourhood I live in, there is a family of eight living in a small house. They have lived there for a very long time. They are a Christian family and attend the same church I go to in our neighbourhood. They have chosen to stay in their small home as they feel the necessity to put down roots and build community with their neighbours. The father of this family once came to me to express some guilt about the fact that he is not involved in what I do. I told him that he need not feel any guilt because if everyone did what he is doing then there wouldn't be a need to do what I do for a living.

As Christians, we have missed an overwhelming theme of the gospel if we don't know our neighbours. And we have bought into a lie if we think we need to buy a starter house, wait for its value to increase in a couple of years, and buy a bigger house and keep moving around into bigger houses. This makes it impossible to put down roots of any kind in a community. We cannot answer the question "Who is my neighbour?" if we don't even have a desire to stick around long enough to find out who they are and invest in their lives.

As student-followers of Christ, we need to redeem community. We can start by re-evaluating our priorities and being willing to invest into community. If we buy a home, why not invite the people on our street to our housewarming party? Let's not build a huge privacy fence around our property or put up "Keep of the Grass" signs all over our yards. And while there are still widows and orphans around (people who are homeless, single mothers, people in hospital, the elderly...) let's be willing to enter into community with them as well. I strongly believe that if we could only take these few simple steps, we'd be amazed at how different our world would look.

### **Personal Salvation**

While my focus is on structural or social salvation, we must explore the need for personal salvation as well. Time and time again the Bible points out very clearly the need for personal salvation. "Whoever believes and is

baptized will be saved." (Mk.16:16) "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved". (Acts 2:21)

Jesus is the only Saviour. He said, "I am the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6) He did not say I am a way, a truth, and a life. In our pluralistic culture, this statement is difficult to embrace. As followers of Christ, we must stand firm on the rock of Christ as He is the only solid foundation and only He can save us.

In my years in ministry, I have learned a lot from the people I have been amongst. Perhaps the most important lesson is that it is crucial to be in relationship with people in order to try and introduce them to Jesus. I have always maintained that relationships are the key to any good ministry. If we go about doing ministry outside of the willingness to engage in true relationship building with individuals, we will not succeed. It is only in the context of a trusting relationship where both parties are contributing to and benefiting from it, that I can feel safe to say to the person "I love you enough to tell you that I love and worship Jesus and He has saved me and I would like to tell you about Him." And that person then needs to feel safe enough in the context of our relationship to say to me that he/ she is interested in hearing more or is absolutely not interested at all.

For too long evangelism has been about keeping a running total of the number of souls that we got saved. I have seen countless churches come to the inner city for a day and hand out tracts or set up speakers and play music and preach. Then a handful of people would 'get saved' and the church would report back to its congregation on Sunday morning about how successful their evangelistic outreach was. Then they would never see those people again. Then another church group would come down the following week and the same people would 'get saved'. This is not the way evangelism was originally intended to be by God.

Perhaps the most important result of my 14 years of ministry within the homeless community, rather than having to do with the number of souls I have 'saved', has been the salvation which I myself have experienced. When I first started ministry, I came with somewhat of a patronizing agenda. I came to save people. I came to change their lives. I came as though I had the answers and the people I met needed to learn the truth from me.

I was once building a friendship with a man who had lived on the streets for a years. He was addicted to drugs and could not get out of this lifestyle. We connected as he was very intelligent and extremely interesting to talk to.

At one point along the way, Fred (not his real name) said he wanted to invite Jesus to live in his heart. So one of our staff prayed with him and He became a follower of Christ. In the weeks that followed, he could not understand why he still had cravings for his drug of choice. I, along with several of my staff tried to encourage him that it was OK to struggle and that Jesus still loved him despite his shortcomings.

Fred, however, could not grasp this concept at all. He felt as if he needed to be perfect. So one day he came in with an announcement: "I have decided to ask Jesus to leave my heart". When we questioned him on this choice, his only response was; "I have looked deeply into my heart and I have looked longingly at Jesus. My decision is based on the fact that my heart is simply much too dirty a place for Jesus to live. So out of respect for Him, I have asked Him to leave me".

This experience shook me. While Fred had missed a very foundational aspect of what it means to follow Jesus, he had recognized a deep brokenness in himself that many of us who have chosen to take the Jesus path have never uncovered in ourselves.

The people I came to save were part of my Salvation. It was in the context of community among very broken people that I heard for the first time the voice of God clearly. I discovered that I was very broken and poor myself. I learned that while God may have chosen and used me to be the instrument of touching and changing people's lives, most importantly He brought me here because He knew I could hear His voice best in this context. He knew He could reach me here.

In Isaiah 58, we see that if we go about rebuilding walls, restoring communities and helping people in need, then and only then will our light shine and will we receive healing. So after my 14 years of working amongst the poor, it is in my own life that I can see the most visible results of God's work. And it is those whom I first went to save and transform whom He has used effectively to save and transform me.

My experience has led me to the conviction that if I want to be the presence of Christ in a community, than I

must learn how to experience Christ in that community. ("The word became flesh and dwelt among us." John 1:14) I do not own Jesus. When I think I can bring Him somewhere with me, even if that is a dark alley in the inner city, I need to realize that He is already there.

## **Conclusion**

As student-followers of Jesus, we need to be about the work of the salvation of the world, just as Jesus was. The society we live in is in need of much redemption. Our culture is not the way that the creator originally intended it to be. We are a broken and disillusioned people. We are a people who need God.

As we address the issue of social or systemic salvation, it is my hope that the five areas I have outlined are inter-connected and cannot be addressed separately. We cannot be about the business of the redemption of the church without thinking about community. We cannot address the environment without seeing that the economy, materialism and consumerism are driving forces in environmental decay. And we cannot tackle the redemption of the government unless we include all of these areas in the mix.

As we address personal salvation, we need to be sure that we ourselves have a personal relationship with the Saviour of the world. We then need to be willing to engage the people of our culture in boldness of the fact that we know the truth, not a truth. We should not make any apology for this. However, we need to do this in humility and grace and in the context of relationship so that if people get offended, they are offended by the cross and not the way that the cross gets presented by Christians.

Finally, as we go about the business of seeking both personal and social salvation, we need to be open to experiencing redemption, or to use a more theological term, sanctification, ourselves. When we become peacemakers, truth tellers, and justice seekers for the people and entities in the midst of which we have been placed by God, our own personal healing will come quickly and our light will shine like the dawn. (Is. 58)