

SHAPING A SALVATIONIST RESPONSE TO SUFFERING WITHIN A WESLEYAN CONTEXT: MOVING BEYOND A THEOLOGICAL KNAPSACK

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This article has been peer reviewed

This article considers the comparative lack of discussion of human suffering and divine sovereignty within The Salvation Army – and the absence of specifically Wesleyan teaching despite the Army's historical roots within the Wesleyan tradition. It identifies the differences that exist between the 'received theology' of The Salvation Army and the 'expressed theology' of Salvationists. Consideration is given to contemporary Wesleyan scholarship in order to shape a Salvationist response to suffering in the light of the doctrine of divine sovereignty.

I. Introduction

Finding an adequate picture of God in light of human suffering appears elusive. Suffering challenges what people believe; how they understand God's role in human suffering; how faith is affected by it; and how they respond when confronted with human tragedy. Suffering has the potential to produce a distorted view of God: not because people have necessarily dismissed God's relevance in their lives but because of the confusion and the uncertainty that suffering consequently produces.

As people are confronted with the enormity of their own personal suffering their perception of God becomes a strong factor in their response. Is God viewed as the instigator or as a God of love who has also been aggrieved? A person's faith is then placed under some sort of theological microscope: will faith be strengthened or will faith be diminished; even lost? Influences on a Christian life often then become the driving force. These influences include many factors such as people's experience and denominational teaching.

Over many years of my own ministry experience within The Salvation Army I have observed a difference between a

Salvationist's 'expressed theology' and the 'received theology' of The Salvation Army.¹ When faced with suffering, Salvationists appear to rely on their experiences as the major influence on their faith. The image of God can often be clouded by people's preconceived ideas. Consequently, Salvationists' expressed theology may be inadequate if they rely too heavily on lived experiences, since experiences alone cannot fully shape a person's understanding of God. A Salvationist's perception of God may not always match the teaching of the denomination.

Finding an answer to suffering is not the aim of this article. It seeks instead the shaping of a Salvationist response to suffering within a Wesleyan context by understanding what contemporary Wesleyan scholars are saying and how this is contributing to the wider discussion of God's sovereignty in the face of suffering. This article will consider the transcendent and immanent natures of God, along with contemporary theologies of the suffering God. It will also provide background to the historical development of The Salvation Army and its theological roots and how contemporary Wesleyan scholarship could shape and influence Salvation Army received theology.

Through crisis experiences the complexity of the dialectic nature of God's immanence and transcendence in the face of evil can increase confusion and uncertainty in people. Problems emerge if one of these seemingly contradictory concepts of God is considered in isolation from the other. For 'an overemphasis on transcendence can lead to a theology that is irrelevant to the cultural context in which it seeks to speak, whereas an overemphasis on immanence can produce a theology held captive to a specific culture.'² Moreover, these concepts need to coalesce to achieve a better representation of God's attributes, rather than an incomplete picture. Correlating an all-powerful God with the image of a vulnerable God who is also relational brings the immanent and transcendent aspects of God into sharp focus. The image of a vulnerable God may be more likely to resonate with some people but how this picture equates with an all-powerful God remains perplexing. How God is viewed then becomes a critical issue as the

¹ "Received" theology here concerns the acceptance by individuals (Officers and Adult Salvationists) of official statements of doctrine/theology; whereas "Expressed" theology is how those same people actually function in life.

² Stanley J. Grenz, and Roger E. Olson, *20th Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove, ILL: Inter Varsity Press, 1992), 11f.

immanent and transcendent nature of God is considered in the context of human suffering. The way contemporary scholarship has considered these issues in light of grief and pain – often on a global scale – can aid in the discovery of a deeper awareness of God.

II. Contemporary Theology of a Suffering God

Throughout the centuries theologians have grappled with the immanent and transcendent nature of God.³ In each century the culture of the time and tragic circumstances which had a profound impact on the era, often shaped the historical development of theological discussion. This was particularly evident in the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries. A significant shift in the theological landscape occurred in 1914, a year that ‘shattered the optimistic world view developed during the previous centuries and gave birth to...intellectual and cultural gloom.’⁴ Over ensuing decades the effects of the Depression and the Second World War wreaked havoc across Europe, and brought further gloom. Consequently, by the 1960s there was a need to find a way through the theological maze of uncertainty as the future hung somewhere between gloom and optimism. Three distinct voices became prominent during this decade: the ‘Death of God’ phenomenon; Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s writings, especially his book *Letters and Papers from Prison*; and Jürgen Moltmann’s theology which connected strongly with a God who suffers.

The ‘Death of God’ phenomenon became a major influence on surrounding culture.⁵ As Europe emerged through the cloud of death and destruction, people were still trying to recover their faith and identity. However, cultural responses of the time provided a

³ Immanuel Kant, G.W.F Hegel, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, Rudolf Bultmann, Reinhold Niebuhr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Jürgen Moltmann, Karl Rahner and Hans Küng to mention just a few.

⁴ Grenz and Olson, *20th Century Theology*, 12.

⁵ For further reference of the ‘Death of God’ phenomenon refer to: Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (London: SCM Press, 1974); Robert R. Williams, *Tragedy, Recognition, and the Death of God: Studies in Hegel and Nietzsche* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Frederick Depoortere, *The Death of God: An Investigation into the History of the Western Concept of God* (London: T & T Clark, 2008); Thomas J.J. Altizer, and William Hamilton, *Radical Theology and the Death of God* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968); Deland S. Anderson, *Hegel’s Speculative Good Friday: The Death of God in Philosophical Perspective* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1995).

philosophical view that had been considered in the nineteenth century by Friedrich Nietzsche and which had now gained a new audience. 'Nietzsche's declaration...that "God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him!" thus expresses the general cultural atmosphere which finds no place for God.'⁶ While this view emerged within wider cultural surroundings, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Jürgen Moltmann's writings emphasised a contrasting view, within Christian circles, that God suffers. It was now possible to see how God, in light of the suffering of the cross, could identify with those who had suffered the terrible atrocities of war. Bonhoeffer's writings particularly emphasised the self-limiting nature of God in suffering.

God lets himself be pushed out of the world on to the cross. He is weak and powerless in the world, and that is precisely the way, the only way, in which he is with us and helps us...The Bible directs us to God's powerlessness and suffering; only the suffering God can help.⁷

Bonhoeffer's writings provided a sense of hopefulness and a reminder to people that they were not alone in their afflictions as they saw a God who stoops to minister out of the pain of God's own suffering. This picture of a suffering, immanent God reflects the preparedness of the Almighty Transcendent One to reach into humanity's frailty and emerge victorious through it.

Additionally, a sense of optimism and hope emerged through Moltmann's theology. Like Bonhoeffer, Moltmann's experiences during the war contributed to his strong sense of connection between God's suffering on the cross and that of humanity's own suffering.

Understood in Trinitarian terms, God both transcends the world and is immanent in history...[God] is, if one is prepared to put it in inadequate imagery, transcendent as Father, immanent as Son and opens up the future of history as the Spirit. If we understand God in this way, we can understand our own history, the history of suffering and the history of hope, in the history of God.⁸

⁶ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 221.

⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (London: SCM Press, 1999), 360f.

⁸ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 255f.

The suffering that unites God and humanity is the hope that leads out of that anguish and into the eschatological hope for the future. What Moltmann seeks to convey is that hope is not just for the immediacy of the moment but continues into eternity.⁹ While these scholars were reflecting on a time in the twentieth century marked by oppression, death and the struggles of war, their message of hope continued to resonate as the new century commenced.

Soon after the dawn of the twenty-first century the world again bore witness to anguish and pain on a global scale with such events as 9/11 and the Boxing Day tsunami. Inevitably these events will be remembered as defining moments that have shaped current theological and cultural views on suffering and evil. It is not surprising therefore that Christians struggle to align what is happening in the world with what their faith should affirm. Consequently, it becomes increasingly difficult to find a way through the emotional turmoil of suffering and discover adequate responses that can affirm a person's faith.

Tragedies such as those described above bring the idea of God's sovereignty to the forefront of people's minds. A confrontation occurs between what we know to be certain and assured, and a vulnerable and uncertain future that is less predictable. Faith then needs somehow to speak into that confusion. Often that is where a combination of a person's experience and the teaching of their particular denomination can fill that space and people can find renewed hope.

The received theology of The Salvation Army not only needs to be readily accessible but also able to articulate its position on issues such as God's sovereignty in the midst of suffering in light of the current context. The Salvation Army has a rich heritage of Wesleyan teaching and this emphasis needs to be explicitly captured in the received theology of the denomination.

III. The Salvation Army's 'Received' Theology

Historically, The Salvation Army – and in particular its Founder, General William Booth – held to a very pragmatic approach to mission and ministry which was also firmly grounded within a Wesleyan/Methodist theological framework. According to Eason

⁹ Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (London: SCM Press, 1977).

and Green, 'Although William Booth may have been a pragmatist rather than a systematic theologian, his actions did not amount to a thoughtless evangelism. As he had learned early in life, the business of saving souls required theological motivation and effective methods.'¹⁰ The Wesleyan/Methodist influence upon William Booth guaranteed a firm theological framework for the Army in two distinct areas: salvation and holiness. 'Booth preached redemption, and the biblical doctrine of holiness was part of God's redemptive purpose for every believer. That doctrine was not an amendment to his theology but the core of his theology'.¹¹

During the Army's formative years, Booth's passion for the salvation of the world contributed to the expansion of The Salvation Army. Additionally, Catherine Booth's passion for preaching, for women's equality and her definitive theology were embedded within the fabric of the movement they created. When the Booths arrived in the East End of London and saw the evidence of the socio-economically deprived, often the illiterate and rejected of society living in such spiritually and physically appalling conditions, Booth had found his destiny. The Salvation Army was established to minister to the people in the streets who were not welcomed in more formal church settings. Booth's passion and calling was to 'go for souls and go for the worst.'¹² While William concentrated his efforts in the East End of London, Catherine's connection with the West End of London provided her with the avenue to preach and bear witness to the work that the Booths were doing elsewhere. '[T]heir most reliable asset...was Catherine's preaching in the West End, provincial towns, and summer resorts, where she found generous individuals willing to support the family and the mission.'¹³ These funds gave an opportunity for the

¹⁰ Andrew M. Eason and Roger J. Green, eds., *Boundless Salvation: The Shorter Writings of William Booth* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2012), 21.

¹¹ Roger J. Green, *The Life & Ministry of William Booth: Founder of the Salvation Army* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 34.

¹² There are many 'slogans' or epithets which are common currency within The Salvation Army despite their origins which are either unknown or suffering from dubious attributions. An example of this would be the so called 'While women weep' speech by William Booth which is embedded within the folklore of The Salvation Army. An abbreviated reference to the folkloric nature of the speech is recorded on The Salvation Army's new international website:

[http://web.salvationarmy.org/ihq/www_sa.nsf/00e47fe418f5c83280256cf4005d2293/13c5b771fd115c52802573cc005578bf/\\$FILE/Page20.pdf](http://web.salvationarmy.org/ihq/www_sa.nsf/00e47fe418f5c83280256cf4005d2293/13c5b771fd115c52802573cc005578bf/$FILE/Page20.pdf), accessed 30 January 2013.

¹³ Norman Murdoch, *Origins of the Salvation Army* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994), 49.

movement to reach out to the most marginalised people with the message of salvation. The emphasis on the pragmatic approach to ministry would seem to have overshadowed the theological framework which undergirded much of what the Booths had accomplished.

In the ensuing years the emphasis on the practical nature of the Army's ministry became paramount and – to its detriment – the willingness to reflect theologically has generally not been given the priority it deserves within the denomination. Arguably, in order to achieve the mission of The Salvation Army, a minimalist approach to theology combined with established doctrinal positions had proven sufficient to aid its missional outcomes. This minimalist emphasis appears to have been validated by General Frederick Coutts in *The Officer* magazine.¹⁴ '[F]or the militant mission on which [the Army] set out...its doctrinal impedimenta had to go into the smallest of knapsacks...Common sense and immediate emotional power were the criteria of truth...essential for the campaign against sin.'¹⁵

In the establishment of The Salvation Army as a para-military organisation, the image of a portable, theological knapsack would not have seemed out of place. The military language employed only conveyed and reiterated the minimalist approach in order to keep only that which was sufficient to equip Salvationists (soldiers) as they headed out into the mission (battle) fields. The time has now come to move beyond the 'smallest of knapsacks' approach. A broadening of the theological framework needs to be developed to maintain the missional heartbeat of the movement in order to consider the many issues that confront Salvationists and the denomination as a whole. One of these issues is the defence of the goodness of God in the face of human suffering.

Since the inception of *The Officer* magazine in 1893 the contributions which have been made by officers in the area of suffering, have predominantly been from an experiential rather than a theological position. This response is perhaps indicative of the way theological reflection has been viewed in the past.

As Salvationists tend to operate more pragmatically, when they are confronted with tragedy, wrestling with suffering as a

¹⁴ *The Officer* magazine is a periodical to which Salvation Army Officers across the world are invited to contribute articles reflecting on ministry issues. It is not an academic journal.

¹⁵ Frederick Coutts, 'Another Occasional Footnote: "The Smallest of Knapsacks",' *The Officer* November (1981), 504.

theological issue can become a daunting experience. Yet despite the pain that comes '[s]uffering does not prevent us from affirming our faith and trust in God; indeed, it may open up new ways of doing so.'¹⁶ Suffering may bring people to the brink of a faith crisis or bring them to a deeper awareness of God.

While The Salvation Army should never lose its pragmatic approach to its mission, it is equally important that the Army maintain a strong theological framework that underpins all of its mission and ministry. Both elements are essential for a strong, vibrant expression of Salvation Army faith and practice.¹⁷ The Salvation Army's eleven Articles of Faith have provided a sound framework within which Salvationists' received theology has been shaped. *The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine* outlines each of the eleven Articles of Faith; the second doctrine is critical for this discussion.¹⁸ It has only been in the most recent edition of the *Handbook of Doctrine* (2010) that any reference to the issue of theodicy and God's divine sovereignty has been included within the explanation of the second doctrine.¹⁹ In earlier editions of the *Handbook of Doctrine* there has been a minimalist approach to the discussion of the doctrine of God. However, given The Salvation Army's historical connection with the Wesleyan tradition, it is surprising to discover a significant absence of any distinct reference to Wesleyan teaching.²⁰

In seeking to shape a Salvationist response to suffering consideration needs to be given to both the current teaching within

¹⁶ Alister E. McGrath, *Suffering* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1992), 89.

¹⁷ One sign of interest in theology that has emerged in more recent decades on an international scale for The Salvation Army has been the development of its theological journal *Word & Deed* which invites discussion on Salvation Army doctrine and theology. Additionally, in the last few years a tri-territorial theological forum including Australia Southern Territory, Australia Eastern Territory and New Zealand/Fiji Territory has been assembled for officers and Salvationists to present theological papers for discussion.

¹⁸ The second doctrine states: 'We believe that there is only one God, who is infinitely perfect, the Creator, Preserver, and Governor of all things, and who is the only proper object of religious worship.' The Salvation Army, *The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine* (London: Salvation Books, 2010; repr., 2013), xv.

¹⁹ *Handbook of Doctrine*, 43-48. A significant change came in 1998 with the release of a new edition of the Army's doctrine book entitled, *Salvation Story: Salvationist Handbook of Doctrine* (London: Salvation Army International Headquarters, 1998). This included a prepared study guide published a year later. For easier accessibility and usage, *Salvation Story* and its study guide were then combined to create the 2010 edition which was renamed *Handbook of Doctrine*.

²⁰ Historically, in earlier formulations of the *Handbook of Doctrine*, there has been a similar lack of such teaching material.

the *Handbook of Doctrine* and contemporary Wesleyan scholarship. Both these elements will assist in bridging the gap between how Salvationists view the received theology of The Salvation Army and how it correlates to their own expressed theology.

IV. A Contemporary Wesleyan Theology of Suffering

Shaping Salvationists' responses to suffering, and reconnecting with the Army's Wesleyan roots is a logical way forward. However, it is not a matter of simply applying earlier Wesleyan teaching to a twenty-first century context. Therefore, consideration will be given to various contemporary Wesleyan scholars on these presenting issues and these will now be briefly sketched.

In attempting to establish a contemporary Wesleyan framework, it is important to consider the classical theistic position and to avoid a caricature of the classical approach. Without this piece of the theological puzzle, there is no frame of reference for Salvationists to approach the more contemporary views that have developed over time. A person's intellectual reasoning that God's sovereignty and goodness can co-exist in the face of evil remains a perplexing paradox to negotiate. When suffering becomes personal, and intellectual reasoning is obscured from view, any responses are perhaps less likely to arise from a head knowledge but instead from a heart that is broken and less interested in drawing logical conclusions.

Evil is a comprehensive term...which appears to be inconsistent with the good and wise plan of a God of holy love. It comprises the suffering which exists in...all human suffering in body and mind, due to natural calamity, disease and death, human stupidity, weakness and mismanagement, and to deliberate wrongdoing and cruelty. The concept of evil also includes the notion of sin...rebellion against the moral and spiritual order of God. Clearly, the presence of evil is the great and final mystery of life. It is to be noted, however, that this mystery, which darkens the minds and spirits of so many with frustration, bewilderment, rebellion, and unbelief, is a mystery which is created by the doctrine of the goodness and wisdom of the one sovereign God.²¹

²¹ John Lawson, *Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press, 1986), 66f.

While the classical theistic position may continue to be the predominant one within a Salvation Army context, this view may appear unable to offer satisfactory answers to the questions which are raised by suffering and evil. However it still needs to be considered alongside some contemporary Wesleyan positions that have tended to move towards process theology and open theism.²² It provides a starting point to establish how contemporary approaches have been developed, how scholars have drawn their conclusions and what responses can be considered within a Salvation Army context.

Contemporary Wesleyan theologians such as Clark Pinnock, John B Cobb Jr, Thomas Jay Oord and Michael Lodahl have moved beyond the more traditional view. It is important to see the points of similarities and the differences in how process theologians and open theists within the Wesleyan tradition view God's involvement in the world.²³

The open theistic position places God within time which conveys a more closely relational God instead of observing activities from some distant vantage point.²⁴ Clark Pinnock reflects on the importance of a relational God to humanity.

Too often in the past we have thought of God as unchangeable substance or an all-controlling power too seldom as a Triune communion of love, internally relational and involved with creatures...We need to view God as participating in human affairs and vulnerable for the sake of love; he is not an invulnerable onlooker.²⁵

Perception is significant and Pinnock draws the focus away from the classical view of God as being distant and uncaring to entertain the idea that God becomes vulnerable in order to be relational. While this image is very helpful and resonates for people on an emotional level, this change in perception raises the dilemma of how a vulnerable God can also remain omnipotent and transcendent, especially since we consider such concepts to be

²² Classical theism includes a response to the enigma: 'God is omnipotent, and God is perfectly good, and evil exists.' See Stephen T. Davis, ed. *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1973), 3.

²³ In fact, there may be some scholars who would not consider them Wesleyan at all.

²⁴ Stephen J. Wright, 'Theological Method and the Doctrine of God,' Lecture in Sydney College of Divinity Unit TH287 Wesleyan Theology, taught at Booth College, 2012), 1.

²⁵ Clark H. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), x.

mutually exclusive in order for them to function effectively. Additionally open theists view the future as being open.²⁶ Unlike conventional thinking which has a more deterministic focus, open theists see life as being contingent and far less controlled.

While these are the commonalities process theologians and open theists share, there are also distinct differences relating to the omnipotence of God and free will. 'While openness theists affirm that God voluntarily gives freedom to the creature, process theists see freedom as an essential characteristic of the creature.'²⁷ Furthermore, William Hasker highlights the differences between the two views as it relates to the omnipotence of God.

[A]ccording to free will theism, but not according to process theism, God has the power to intervene in particular cases, so as to prevent disasters....Since God has the power to do this, one may ask why...he has not done it. It seems, then, that there is still a question the free will theist must face, whereas for the process theist no such question exists.²⁸

Pinnock encapsulates the views mentioned above in the following way. 'In the openness model, God still reserves the power to control everything, whereas in process thought God cannot override the freedom of creatures. This is a fundamental and crucial difference.'²⁹

While a classical understanding of God's omnipotence reflects a more transcendent and distant image of God emphasizing God's power, sovereignty and Lordship, John Cobb Jr. redefines the term. The problem with the more classical understanding of God's omnipotence, according to Cobb is that:

[T]here can be no satisfactory explanation of the evil in the world that does not reject the power of God. To avoid both seeing God as the author of evil and denying God any significant power, we need a basic reconception of what is meant by power.³⁰

²⁶ Wright, 'Theological Method,' 2.

²⁷ John Cobb, and Clark H Pinnock (eds), *Searching for an Adequate God: A Dialogue between Process and Free Will Theists* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), xi.

²⁸ William Hasker in *Searching for an Adequate God*, 45.

²⁹ Cobb, *Searching for an Adequate God*, xi.

³⁰ John Cobb, *God and the World* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1965), 88.

One objection raised against the classical theistic argument is that if God is all-powerful then God must be implicated in the evil and suffering of this world, therefore, God cannot be both all-powerful and good. Cobb however, provides an alternative view as he perceives God's omnipotence as 'persuasive' power.³¹ This does not mean that God's omnipotence is somehow reduced in its effectiveness but it provides an alternative way of interpreting God's power. Cobb articulates the differences between these alternative views.

It no longer means that God exercises a monopoly of power and compels everything to be just as it is. It means instead that he exercises the optimum persuasive power in relation to whatever is. Such an optimum is a balance between urging toward the good and maximizing the power – therefore the freedom – of the one whom God seeks to persuade.³²

God's persuasive power therefore, is relational. Cobb moves beyond the idea that God's omnipotence comes from a distant, perhaps uncaring Deity to one of a relational Creator exercising power which 'depends rather on relations of respect, concern, and love.'³³ Cobb's redefinition of God's omnipotence as 'persuasive power' has significant implications for how humanity views God's response to the evil and suffering that exists in the world. God's omnipotence is not something that manipulates and controls the causes and effects in this world but instead Cobb redefines God's power to intervene by persuasion in the circumstances that have arisen.

Cobb's argument ultimately includes the concept of hope and belief in God but he also acknowledges that a circular argument exists: '[I]f there is no hope...we cannot affirm life and humanity...there can be no theodicy...we cannot believe in God.'³⁴ Cobb then affirms the contrasting view that, 'if we do believe in God, then we can hope...we can affirm life and humanity...if we can affirm life and humanity, then the problem of theodicy is existentially solvable, even if we must confess our perplexity about many questions.'³⁵

³¹ Cobb, *God and the World*, 90.

³² Cobb, *God and the World*, 90.

³³ Cobb, *God and the World*, 90.

³⁴ Cobb, *God and the World*, 100.

³⁵ Cobb, *God and the World*, 100.

Here Cobb seems to draw the emphasis away from the questions that arise and instead encourages a focus on the hope that belief in God brings. He acknowledges the reality that the questions will still arise but they should not remain the central focus. If the focus remains disproportionately on the questions that suffering raises, there is a greater chance that people will be drawn further away from God and hope will diminish.

By contrast, Thomas J. Oord considers theodicy in three distinct terms, each permeated with the essence of love: 'essential free-will theism...postulates that all existing individuals...possess a measure of freedom that cannot be entirely withdrawn or overridden by others.'³⁶ Secondly, 'accidental free-will theism...[suggests that] God *could* withdraw or override creaturely powers but has chosen to regulate divine power in conformity to divine love'.³⁷ Thirdly, as we often question God's role in human suffering, Oord speaks of the term 'essential kenosis...[which] affirms that God never coerces and is thus not culpable for failing to prevent evil.'³⁸

Oord responds to the work of John Polkinghorne's 'kenosis theory'.³⁹ This theory predominantly considers God's self-emptying nature described in Philippians 2. While there might not be a consensus about what this passage means 'many speculate that it best be interpreted as divine self-limitation for the sake of others'.⁴⁰ As Oord outlines Polkinghorne's argument which considers God's self-limiting nature, he provides an alternative response.

A key to my *kenosis* theodicy is...that God's prevenient provision of the power for freedom to every creature derives from God's essence. This means that prevenient grace is a necessary, not wholly voluntary, aspect of deity.⁴¹

Within his argument Oord draws out the characteristics of God as love, as relational, and as possessing power that is given and not

³⁶ Bryan P Stone, & Thomas Jay Oord, eds., *Thy Nature & Thy Name Is Love: Wesleyan and Process Theologies in Dialogue* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 2001), 199.

³⁷ Stone and Oord, 199f.

³⁸ Thomas Jay Oord, ed., *Creation Made Free: Open Theology Engaging Science* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2009), 49.

³⁹ See John Polkinghorne, *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2001).

⁴⁰ Thomas Jay Oord, 'A Kenosis Theodicy,' paper delivered at the *Wesleyan Theological Society Meeting* (Olivet Nazarene University, 2007), 3.

⁴¹ Oord, 'A Kenosis Theodicy,' 7.

reserved exclusively for Godself.⁴² While Salvationists might readily agree with the first two characteristics, it is the concept of God's power that may challenge their preconceived idea of God's nature. In his conclusion, Oord states categorically "The loving God of this kenosis theory is not culpable for failing to prevent genuine evil. The necessarily kenotic God lovingly provides the power and freedom necessary for creatures to respond."⁴³ God maintains the position of Deity but also shows the extent to which God reaches out to humanity, all for the sake of love.

Michael Lodahl also emphasises the nature of God's love – often relating his position to the creation narrative in Genesis and to the earliest accounts of humanity's rejection of God's desire for relationship. In *The Story of God*, Lodahl makes particular reference to God's immutability.

The doctrine of divine *immutability*...should not suggest...that God is flat and static...but that God is immutably and eternally *love*. But this in turn implies that God...is eternally ready and willing to love and to be loved, to be engaged and involved and at risk in the creation for the creatures. God's decision to share freedom with human beings...to create beings who can and quite often do act against His purposes, is actually a decision to limit himself.⁴⁴

The extent to which God risks and is prepared to limit Godself in order to re-establish relationship with humanity is testament to the way God leaves the future open: not everything is determined, nothing is restricted and there is room for randomness to occur in suffering.⁴⁵ This may be perplexing for people who have a deterministic view of the world but Lodahl challenges people's perceptions of how God operates in the world. He reminds his readers that "[t]he God who is free creates an open future in which, because of the freedom He has shared with us, His own heart can be broken."⁴⁶ This is the risk God takes in order for people to have the freedom that has been given to them.

⁴² Oord, 'A Kenosis Theodicy,' 5-7.

⁴³ Oord, 'A Kenosis Theodicy,' 8.

⁴⁴ Michael Lodahl, *The Story of God: Wesleyan Theology & Biblical Narrative* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1994), 88.

⁴⁵ See also: John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove, ILL: Intervarsity Press, 1998).

⁴⁶ Lodahl, *The Story of God*, 89.

While this brief explanation of classical theism, process and open theism may appear to be an over-simplification, it provides a starting point for further exploration and comparison with the received theology of The Salvation Army.

While the current classical theistic position is evident in the *Handbook of Doctrine*, there is an opportunity to have a robust discussion in order to develop the received theology of The Salvation Army as it relates to God's sovereignty in the midst of suffering. Engaging with contemporary Wesleyan scholarship provides an opportunity to reflect theologically on several questions. Historically how has The Salvation Army's received theology articulated issues relating to suffering and Divine Sovereignty? To what extent does experience appear to be the primary influence on Salvationists' 'expressed theology'? To what extent do Salvationists' responses to suffering appear to be inadequate and comparatively unaware of The Salvation Army's teaching? How might contemporary Wesleyan approaches and classical Wesleyan theology inform Salvationists' expressed theology? What implications might a contemporary Wesleyan approach have for the existing received theology of The Salvation Army as part of the holiness movement? What might be the implications for The Salvation Army on an international level if it were to consider engaging in the debate concerning open theism within responses to Army doctrine?

Such a process of reflection would not be an attempt to find an 'answer' to human suffering but a search for a way through it. It has potential to bring a greater awareness within The Salvation Army of the role of God in human suffering; the bearing it has on what Salvationists believe; how faith can be strengthened; and how they can respond when confronted with human tragedy. Engaging with contemporary Wesleyan scholarship will undoubtedly enrich not only the received theology of The Salvation Army but in turn will also enhance Salvationists' expressed theology concerning human suffering. This would provide greater congruence and alignment between Salvationists' received and expressed theology, and allow the space to move beyond the theological knapsack.