



The fifth man

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Some years ago, the British Artillery asked the question: 'What is the role of the fifth man?' The reason was that every cannon was manned by a group of five people. Four of them had specific roles, but it was unclear what the responsibility of the fifth man was. After some research, the answer was found: The fifth man was responsible for the horses! The problem was that decades had passed since there had been any horses to look after. Nonetheless, the fifth man was still there!

When I heard this story, it made me wonder who 'the fifth man' is in The Salvation Army? Do we have practices and methods that are still here, although any sensible reason for their existence has long gone? As I thought about it, the contours of several 'fifth men' appeared.

Let me make it perfectly clear that I am writing from a purely western viewpoint—even from a western European perspective—from a secular, post-modern, neo-pagan culture. Perhaps some in the more 'churched' part of the west will not recognise the issues below, because their cultural setting is different, which leads us to our first question:

Internationalism

Is our internationalism a 'fifth man'? We are proud of our internationalism—'Wherever you go in the world you meet the same Army'—and some might find it almost blasphemous to question it. But it would be a crafty strategy of our enemy to make

us proud of a weakness and regard it as a strength.

A number of years ago, a brilliant article was published in *The Officer* (might I, in passing, mention that it was written by a Dane!) asking the question whether the Army was an international movement which originated from England or whether it was a British movement working all over the world? For most of our history, I think the latter has been true. Our so called 'internationalism' was essentially a leftover of British imperialism. The reason we were one Army was because we did it 'the British way' all over the world. There is no question it worked well in many, maybe even most places at the turn of the last century, but at the dawn of the 21st century, things have changed.

English export

Let me give you a simple illustration. When I was 12, I moved to England with my officer-parents and, among other things, had to attend an English school. Up until that point, I had never seen, much less worn, a school uniform; never called a teacher 'Miss' or 'Sir', but always used first names and had been taught to have a critical attitude to all subjects, which included questioning what the teacher said. I am not saying the English way of 'doing school' was wrong, but it certainly was different—even strange—for someone from my background. This was not a major problem. I adjusted to my surroundings. But, if someone had tried to 'export' the English school to Denmark, it

would have been culturally insensitive, irrelevant and bound for disaster. I hope the parallels are clear. Is this not what the Army, in the name of our internationalism, has sometimes done?

Internationalism, understood as it often has been as uniformity in looks, methods and structures is a 'fifth man'. It might have served its purpose a hundred years ago, but today it is not only without purpose; it can be a hindrance to effective mission. We live in a diverse world and if we want to reach it for Christ, we need a diverse Army.

This does not mean we cannot be international or have to be 'many Armies'. We can be one Army with 'unity in diversity'. Unity would be expressed in the content of our faith and fundamental principles. Diversity would characterise our forms of expression, structures and methods. For example, wearing uniform is a method to achieve the principle of visibility. The open-air meeting is a method, the principle being to meet people with the gospel wherever we can find them.

This diversity is not a question of national borders—most nations are diverse, made up of many different sub-cultures so even within nations or territories, diversity should not be reluctantly accepted, but it should be strategically encouraged.

Appointment system

What about our appointment system? Is it a 'fifth man'? 'Why do you move people around in the way you do?' I wish I had a Euro for every time I have heard that question! Unfortunately, I have never yet been able to give a satisfactory answer. Why do we do it?

I know we always have done it. I know we call ourselves an 'army' and other armies do it. I also know that during some of the most successful times of the Army's expansion, officers were moved much more frequently than now. But why do we still do it?

I remember years ago being struck by a sentence in *How Do Churches Grow?* by Roy Pointer: 'Denominations like The Salvation Army that move pastors frequently actually encourage church decline.' After years of church growth influence, many of us are aware of the research that indicates that it is after five to seven years of a pastor's ministry that things really begin to happen. In theory, most of us agree: continuity is a keyword and longer stays are recognised as important. We

have improved immensely over the last years, but are still far away from normative long stays. The natural question is: 'Why?' If we know the probability for growth rises with longer stays for the officers, why is it not happening?

The problem, as I see it, is that continuity and an appointment system are mutually incompatible—you can have one or the other, but not both. The primary focus of our work should be the local corps. The local congregation is God's strategic plan for expanding his Kingdom, but the appointment system focuses on the organisation, moving our attention from what should be our highest priority.

Long stays

If an officer is doing a really good job in a corps, sooner or later he or she will be moved up the system, either as a kind of reward or because a person so gifted and talented should not be kept at a corps, but used to the benefit of the wider army. Is this really Kingdom growth? If people are being won for the Lord and discipled, what could be more important? I know that sometimes it will be the best for the Kingdom to move someone from a corps, but, in most cases, the 'wider Army' would benefit if we let 'successful' officers stay in local corps ministry.

Let me illustrate. Two of the most influential movements in the western church today are the Alpha initiative and the seeker-oriented methodology of Willow Creek. What do they have in common? They both originate from a local church that has made a worldwide impact. And in both cases their senior pastors have been in the church for more than 20 years. Do you think that would ever have happened in the Army or would we have moved Bill Hybels when the church reached 500?

The appointment system certainly had its value, but maybe it is time to realise that it seems to be looking after nonexistent horses, wasting resources and hindering Kingdom growth.

And what about our hierarchy? Is it a 'fifth man'? I willingly admit that I am a child of my age and culture and you would probably have to search a long time to find a less authoritarian society than the Danish. Perhaps I may be simply doing what I am accusing others of—projecting what is culturally right in one context onto another. But, to me, it seems that hierarchical structures are a thing of the past.

Leadership is no longer understood as positional. You are not accepted as a leader simply on the basis of your title, but rather, because of your abilities and your relationships with those you are supposed to lead. Whether we like it or not, leadership no longer follows official lines and structures, but builds on networks and relationships.

In the book *Transforming Transitions*, Eddie Gibbs writes a chapter, which could serve as a prophetic challenge to the Army, called 'From Building Hierarchies to Developing Networks'. In it he shows how a denomination, if hoping to survive postmodernity, has to build on relational networks rather than formal structures; how its authority base must be less positional and far more relational than in previous generations, how it must move from control to empowerment and from bureaucratic to apostolic leadership.

Denominational resurrection.

Gibbs believes in denominations, but also contends that 'the present cultural upheaval from modernity to postmodernity . . . will necessitate not merely the structural re-engineering of denominations, but their death and resurrection,' and goes on to say that 'it is those churches which refuse to bury their nostalgia and dismantle their defenses that will fail to survive'.

When an Englishman who is an Anglican clergyman living in the USA writes this, it leads me to believe this is not merely a Danish or a European question, but at least a western one. Actually, I believe the question is far more fundamental, and therefore probably international, than this. It is difficult to find a biblical basis for our hierarchy and to be honest, there is at least an inherent danger that hierarchical structures oppose the biblical concept of servant leadership. They can lead us into the temptation of seeking status and recognition, of wanting to 'be someone', whereas Jesus tells us to consider ourselves as unworthy slaves, who are just doing what is expected of us.

Another inherent danger in a hierarchical structure is the manner in which it tends to favour age over ability and giftedness. Sometimes we excuse this by stressing the value of experience. It is true that certain senior leadership positions demand experience, but do age and experience necessarily follow each other? As someone once replied to a schoolteacher, who claimed 30 years of

experience: 'No sir, you have had one year of experience, repeated 29 times!'

Some time ago, I tried to compare the age of the prime minister (or equivalent) in several European countries with the age of the territorial commander in the same country. Not claiming any scientific validity, the research indicated that it usually takes about 10 years more experience to become a territorial commander than the political leader of a country! Of course there are exceptions—we all know of cases where people hold responsibilities that usually have been held by people much older but these are exceptions, and rare.

In Victorian England a hierarchy established on military lines, with an appointment system and uniformity was probably the most culturally sensitive and effective model of leadership. But in a world influenced by postmodernity, it is probably time to move on and dismantle it. It will certainly cause unease and insecurity, but if that forces us to strengthen our security in Christ and not in positions or titles, this will not be a bad thing.

If, at the same time, it makes us more effective in reaching and discipling the lost, we do not really have a choice.

Are these three—our internationalism, the appointment system and our hierarchy—the only 'fifth men' in the Army? Probably not. Are they the most important ones to come to terms with? I honestly do not know. But I have a feeling that the time has come to let go of the phantom horses and release the resources tied up in the fifth men so they can be used to further the expansion of the Army and the growth of the Kingdom of God.

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