In 1890, General William Booth outlined a scheme in a book titled *In Darkest England and the Way Out*, offering a plan he argued that “if realised would solve the worst problems of modern society”. This scheme aimed to see people saved spiritually from sin and temptation, as well as physically from the pollution and poverty that pervaded the increasingly industrialised cities of English society.

*In Darkest England* was a popular and controversial book when published 125 years ago. However, as Craig Campbell noted, due to the distance in time and culture between Booth and today “the language can appear quaint, the analysis inadequate, and the style somewhat anecdotal”. Yet, Campbell adds, *‘In Darkest England’ articulates foundational principles. ... [society] must take responsibility to care for its citizens and in this the church is also responsible. Charity alone is not enough; the causes of need and injustice must also be addressed. The individual person has value.”*

Hence, *In Darkest England* has remained an influential and important text not only for Salvationists but also for Christians concerned with the biblical mandate for justice and the treatment of the poor, outcast and alien in today’s society.

Today millions of people in societies across the world struggle to survive or deal with the often harmful physical, social, environmental and spiritual effects of poverty, inequality, unemployment, crime and incarceration, disease and health issues, addiction, homelessness and more. It is timely to reflect on the impact, the insights, the past applications and potential future of Booth’s significant work for Salvationists, the wider church, society at large and, indeed, the entirety of God’s household here on Earth.

When we reflect on Booth’s challenge through *In Darkest England* after 125 years, many questions arise. One question is simply: How are we going? Is Booth’s manifesto still valid in the 21st century? How could The Salvation Army corporately — and Salvationists individually — be living more practically holy lives in response to the Gospel in our varied contexts?

The contributors to this new book, *Darkness and Deliverance*, explore various historical aspects of *In Darkest England*, including Booth’s theology; the book’s public reception and impact; how the scheme affected the work of the Army; and a fascinating look at life on a Salvation Army farming community in the USA. There is analysis of the question of whether William Booth actually wrote the book and an often forgotten *In Darkest England* supplement, *Darkest India*.

A number of chapters explore what Booth’s scheme might mean for us today in terms of social justice, assisting those who are especially troubled, and other contemporary expressions of *In Darkest England*. There are reflections on the missional purposes of buildings and other “apparatus” and imagining the future of a Salvation Army that understands and lives justice in creative, committed and Christ-like ways.

Two chapters consider questions such as: In what ways can The Salvation Army speak into or adopt holistic missional approaches that take seriously the interrelatedness of spiritual, social and ecological aspects of life?

One chapter looks at some current environmental issues, noting that caring for people includes caring for the Earth on which we all live. A second chapter explores a number of different expressions of Salvation Army ministry and mission that links spiritual wellbeing, social issues and ecological health. These projects include community gardens and farming ventures that follow closely in the footsteps of William Booth’s *In Darkest England* scheme.

Even as there is so much more to be considered, unearthed and conversed about regarding the influential work that is *In Darkest England and the Way Out*, I am thrilled that this collection of impressive writings from a group of great people from around the world has become a reality.

*Darkness and Deliverance* does not attempt to provide all the answers, however, it hopes to encourage, challenge and spark further conversations and practical actions within the Army.

It is sincerely hoped that this gathering of minds around the theme of *In Darkest England* will be of use and benefit to Salvationists, The Salvation Army, our local communities, wider societies and indeed to all of God’s loved creation, for the glory of God!

An e-book (Salvos Publishing) is available from Amazon.com for $10.60 or go to chaordiccreative.com/darkness-and-deliverance to order a softcover printed copy and to find extra online materials.

— Matthew Seaman

**First published in OnFire magazine.**