



THE SALVATION ARMY: UNITED KINGDOM TERRITORY  
POSITIONAL STATEMENT

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

The Salvation Army recognises that the opinions of Salvationists are divided on the moral acceptability of capital punishment and its effectiveness as a deterrent.

However, to advocate in any way the continuance or restoration of capital punishment would be inconsistent with the Army's purposes and contrary to its belief that all human life is sacred and that each human being, however wretched, can become a new person in Christ. Long experience in rendering service within the criminal justice systems of many lands and in ministering to both offenders and victims, and to their respective families, has confirmed the Army's belief in the possibility of forgiveness and redemption for all.

Arguments based on Scripture have been used both to support and oppose capital punishment, the former drawing primarily on the Old Testament and the latter on the New Testament. The Army recognises that those laws of the Old Testament dealing with ritual and procedure have been superseded in Christ and that a literal adherence to them today would require the death penalty for relatively minor transgressions. Equally, the Army acknowledges that the New Testament does not attempt to provide a systematic treatment of criminal justice, nor does it offer conclusive comment on how society should deal with crime and those who commit it.

Salvationists seek to understand more fully the implications of the fact that the God they worship identified himself with sinners through the life of Jesus, who was unjustly executed as a criminal in degrading circumstances. It was and is the mission of Jesus to bear the pain and penalty of sin within his own nature and person and thereby to make possible the transformation of the character of the offender, who is precious in God's eyes and worthy of redemption.

The Salvation Army acknowledges the need of society to be protected from wrongdoers, especially those willing to use violence, but recognises also the responsibility placed upon society so to regulate itself that the dignity and worth of all persons are made paramount and that the lowest instincts of men and women are not incited or inflamed. Special responsibilities in this regard fall upon publishers, broadcasters, legislators and educators. There is equally a role for the church, the judiciary, the medical profession, and penologists to co-operate in advising government on both crime prevention and the development of just and humane penal systems.

For further reading: Clifton, Shaw: Strong Doctrine, Strong Mercy, The Salvation Army London 1985

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PS 3