

# **The Salvation Army in relation to the Church, the State and Civil Society (UKT)**

## **The Salvation Army and the Church**

The Salvation Army is an expression of God's Church: the people of God,<sup>1</sup> the body of Christ,<sup>2</sup> the temple of the Holy Spirit.<sup>3</sup> The Church exists as one spiritual community of God's people 'called out', 'gathered'<sup>4</sup> and 'sent'<sup>5</sup> into the world by the Father, Son and Spirit,<sup>6</sup> across all ages, cultures and geographical locations. It takes the form of many different local congregations<sup>7</sup> and Christian denominations,<sup>8</sup> of which The Salvation Army is one such international community.<sup>9</sup> God intends this diversity to be celebrated in an essential unity. Salvationists, who are members of The Salvation Army, are therefore called, with all Christians, to bear witness in words and action to the revelation of God's good news for the whole creation in Jesus Christ; to imagine and promote the scope of this good news for human flourishing, through biblical values of justice, righteousness and peace; to practically serve suffering humanity, in the strength of God's Holy Spirit and in Christ's name.

The Salvation Army is widely known for the humanitarian aspect of its work, through social and community service, which is integral to its church identity. It seeks to benefit all people without discrimination.<sup>10</sup> In particular, it embraces the biblical priority of serving those who live in any form of poverty or who otherwise find themselves at the margins of society.<sup>11</sup>

## **The Salvation Army and the State**

The Salvation Army recognises and respects the State, ordained by God to actively preserve the peace, security, freedom and wellbeing of its citizens, through the rule of law. Salvationists are citizens subject to the State's proper laws, governance and tax-raising responsibilities.<sup>12</sup> With all Christians, they are instructed to pray for those who hold positions of authority, recognising the heavy responsibility that they carry.<sup>13</sup>

Because God is the Creator of the whole world,<sup>14</sup> both The Salvation Army and Salvationists are not constrained by any false separation of the sacred and the secular – between religion and politics. In view of biblical values of mercy, justice, peace, honesty and equity, which have an important place in political life, The Salvation Army seeks to engage a democratic State in constructive support, dialogue and critique towards a just society. Salvationists, recognising the Christian's primary allegiance to God,<sup>15</sup> humbly and faithfully seek to uphold the character of God in the world, and to hold the State accountable, with the potential for Government policy, where necessary, to be firmly opposed. They look for political leaders to behave with integrity, consult meaningfully on policies, scrutinise the executive and hold it to account. They expect public policy to have special regard for the poor rather than secure the interests of the rich.

The Salvation Army adopts legal forms made available by the State, which in the UK and Ireland takes the form of a Charity and a Company. It is politically non-partisan. It believes that the Church has a valid voice in influencing governmental and public affairs in a plural society, but it does not promote or endorse specific candidates or political parties. It does, however, encourage Salvationists to engage in public life from both partisan and non-partisan perspectives. As an international community, The Salvation Army understands and promotes the importance of political responsibility that moves beyond the interests of the nation state.

## **The Salvation Army and Civil Society**

The Salvation Army believes it is vital for the wellbeing of the nation that the State promotes and encourages a healthy civil society, in which citizenship involves taking responsibility for each other. Such a society fosters theological themes of solidarity and subsidiarity. Solidarity finds expression in the biblical injunction to 'love one's neighbour as oneself'<sup>16</sup> and should be a global reality that extends beyond national self-interest. Subsidiarity represents a willingness to enable the most local forms of community practically possible to thrive, in which the State's role is not so much to rule as to serve. This does not mean that the voluntary sector should supplant the more comprehensive role of the State in providing social welfare, but that local expressions of civil society are vital for human flourishing. The Salvation Army believes that its active local congregations and its social and community services are a vital and valid expression of civil society.

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<sup>1</sup> ‘But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy’ (1 Peter 2:9-10).

<sup>2</sup> ‘Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it’ (1 Corinthians 12:27).

<sup>3</sup> ‘Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives among you?’ (1 Corinthians 3:16).

<sup>4</sup> ‘Called out’ and ‘gathered’ are fundamental aspects of the original Greek word *ekklesia*, which is translated in the NT as ‘church’ but originally denoted the political reality of a group of people called out of their homes to gather together in a public place.

<sup>5</sup> The idea that the Church is ‘sent’ is drawn, not only from God sending Jesus into the world, but also from Jesus sending the first disciples into the world (Matthew 28:19; Acts 1:8). The ‘sentness’ of the Church is held in the familiar word ‘mission’ which come from the Latin verb *mittere*, to send.

<sup>6</sup> Christians worship God as a Trinity of Father, Son and Spirit – one God in three persons.

<sup>7</sup> A congregation is a common term used to denote the ‘gathered’ nature of a local church, as opposed to the universal nature of the Church worldwide.

<sup>8</sup> A denomination, such as The Salvation Army, is a national or international grouping of local churches with its own affiliation or governance, historically autonomous from other local churches and denominations, yet called to discover and affirm the unity which is from God.

<sup>9</sup> For a fuller account of ‘A Salvationist understanding of the Church’, including links to further reading, see: *The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine* (London: Salvation Books, 2010), pp247-53.

<sup>10</sup> As well as not discriminating in a person’s culture, in both UK and Ireland law this is also taken to embrace the list of the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, political opinion, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. However, our commitment to non-discrimination derives from our belief in the equal dignity and worth of all humans.

<sup>11</sup> See The Salvation Army’s Positional Statement on Poverty. ‘Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison and go to visit you?” The King will reply, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me”’ (Matthew 25:37-40).

<sup>12</sup> ‘Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves’ (Romans 13:1-2). This subjection is relative, and should be understood in relation to a supreme obedience to God. Christians are called to uphold God’s character in the world, including any necessary and appropriate critique of the State that this might involve, as outlined in the next paragraph.

<sup>13</sup> ‘I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness’ (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

<sup>14</sup> See *The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine* (London: Salvation Books, 2010), p31. ‘Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth’ (Isaiah 40:28).

<sup>15</sup> “‘Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?’ [Jesus] saw through their duplicity and said to them, “Show me a denarius. Whose image and inscription are on it?” “Caesar’s,” they replied. He said to them, “Then give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s”’ (Luke 20:22-25).

<sup>16</sup> ‘One of the teachers of the law... asked [Jesus], “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?” “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbour as yourself”’ (Mark 12:28-31).

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