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**“How can The Salvation Army faithfully engage with the state, the market,
NGOs and FBOs?”**

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A trader in purple cloth¹. Those were the simple days. My husband Simon back in Thyatira dyeing the cloth and me in Philippi selling it. A perfect marriage really – plenty of communication but most of it by letter! The boat would travel between us once a week cloth coming in my direction and money being sent back home. We were both God-fearers, admirers of the Jewish religion. There was no synagogue in Philippi and so I would go down to the river to pray with other God-fearers and Jews. It was there we met Paul and his transforming news about Jesus, the Christ. My household in Philippi became the base for the growing church. Gradually it dawned on me that we were now part of a network of Christians across the Roman Empire. The church at Thyatira made itself known to my husband and he was baptised². Soon the boat was being used to transport not just cloth but Christian slaves escaping from employers who did not accept the new religion. Of course, selling purple cloth meant that all my customers were wealthy and often looking for reliable slaves. I sometimes wondered what business I was in – selling purple cloth or relocating slaves.

I was completely dependent upon my household. I could not have dealt with the business, the people coming and going and the money without trusted household servants whose honesty was beyond question. Juggling business, household and our emerging church was a constant balancing act. Each became dependent upon the other.

The letters continued, including those from Paul. We helped pass his letters from church to church as he travelled the Empire. Peace and the ability to travel – that’s what the Romans did for us. Mind you we paid our taxes.

I found myself often using the prayer taught by Paul and which he put in his final letter to us from Rome.

¹ Acts 16:11-15

² Rev 2: 18-29

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be known to God. And the peace of God which surrounds surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus³.

This paper answers the question in the title by asking three further questions.

- What is The Salvation Army when it seeks to engage?
- If this is what we are, what is the scope for engagement?
- If there is scope for engagement, how do we do it faithfully?

Engagement starts with self-understanding. What is The Salvation Army?

The Booths' were clear that what they were starting was an expression of the church. Major Dr John Read has helpfully gathered together Catherine Booth's understanding of what that meant⁴:

Christ-focused – which involved crossing boundaries 'Christianity must come to them embodied in men and women who are not ashamed to 'eat with publicans and sinners'.

Practical Religion

Missional – Catherine had two missional principles – aggression which meant taking the gospel to where people were and persuading them of its truth and second adaptation which meant that the church should adopt whatever measures and form were effective in reaching people.

Spirit-filled – the Holy Spirit both inspired, empowered and legitimised new measures for reaching people.

Eschatological – the purpose of the church was to bring about the Kingdom of God 'on earth as it is in heaven', confident that the victory over sin had already been won in the death and resurrection of Christ. This gave confidence and focus.

In being adaptive and innovative, the Booths did come up with a particular form of church government or polity. Soldiers banded together in local corps with a commissioned officer in a direct chain of command to the General. The Booths latched onto the organisational innovation of their day, the bureaucracy, expressing particular admiration for the railways with their national reach and coordination of the efforts of many people towards a single aim.

³ Philippians 4: 4-7

⁴ Read, J. (2013). Catherine Booth: Laying the Theological Foundation of a Radical Movement. Eugene, OR, Pickwick Publications. Chapter 5

*Darkest England*⁵ takes us into more complex and sophisticated institutional arrangements with The Salvation Army envisioned as a set of intra-organisational relationships between entities such as the corps, the institution, the company/ mutual enterprise, the colony/compound⁶. This further innovation lay well beyond the church polities of the day. *Darkest England* looked for a single organising intelligence to link up different agencies to deal with social problems at their roots and holistically rather than ameliorate them. *Darkest England* is particularly scathing about charity and philanthropy and sympathetic to producer cooperatives. Charity was only ever a step on the way to a securing an adequate livelihood.

In each country we have to adopt a legal form(s) – we choose pragmatically but it shapes us and how we are perceived⁷. As we enter a new country we enquire what legal form might be available and acceptable to the civil authorities. We take that form and move gradually to registration as a church. In many democratic countries we are obliged to adopt the legal forms of both charity and company and they become a taken for granted part of our identity shaping what we do and how we do it. There is no formless essence of The Salvation Army so the work of discernment is constant.

We have to decide what to do with the bureaucratic government we have inherited based upon a chain of command of appointed officers. Do we take the freedom Catherine offers us to find new means for new times or do we accept the Booths' legacy as giving us a distinctive polity that keeps us on the boundary between the church and the world? For the Booths' the attractions of the bureaucratic form were that it delegated authority to the lowest level whilst retaining accountability, it encouraged activism and expansion whilst offering a level of consistency across different cultural contexts. Today bureaucracy is seen as slow, open to corruption, self-perpetuating and with the arrival of modern information technology, prone to micro-management. However, it has become the dominant form for any organisation seeking to deliver solutions with no serious alternative on offer⁸.

Part of the challenge we face in engaging with other organisations lies, for me, in our lack of clarity about our own organisational identity.

⁵ Booth, W. (1890). *In Darkest England and the Way Out*. London, The Salvation Army.

⁶ *Darkest England* was written by William Booth with the acknowledge assistance of WT Stead, with each chapter being discussed with Catherine as she lay dying of cancer. It is not usually seen as a theological work although it conveys both espoused theology and practical ecclesiology.

⁷ Cameron, H. (2009). *Networks: The Blurring of Institution and Market: How should the Church engage? Entering the new theological space: Blurred encounters in faith, politics and community*. C. Baker and J. Reader. Aldershot, Ashgate. 'Organisational form can be defined as: the legal ownership and constitution under which an organisation operates.' It affects the coordination of work, governance, the way in which resources are obtained and assets managed and the way in which the organisation establishes its legitimacy in the eyes of its stakeholders.

⁸ Cameron, H. (2009). *Networks: The Blurring of Institution and Market: How should the Church engage? Entering the new theological space: Blurred encounters in faith, politics and community*. C. Baker and J. Reader (eds). Aldershot, Ashgate.

If this is what we are what is the scope for engagement?

I want to look in turn at the way we can engage with the market, the state, the household and NGOs and FBOs. I've added the household as a fundamental unit of social organisation in every society. If we cannot engage with the household our other engagements fail in their purpose.

Every engagement has the potential to tackle social problems in a more thorough going way than we could if we acted alone. It also gives us the potential to set up entities that can work more fully with that partner as long as they remain connected to the chain of command.

Engaging with the Market

The market operates by firms producing goods and services which they sell. At their best they generate wealth by adding value to the goods and services through the efforts of their employees. At their worst they turn essential goods (such as oil and sugar) into commodities that can be speculated upon without adding any value and undermining the livelihoods of those who produce them. When The Salvation Army partners with firms or trades in its own name it needs to ensure that it adds value. Like Lydia, in many parts of the world we trade in textiles to generate income for our charitable services. How do we know we trade fairly?

Engaging with the State

The state operates by taxing its citizens in order to provide security and infrastructure. In some countries the state also takes some responsibility for the welfare of its citizens. In such states The Salvation Army often provides welfare services under contract to the state. We have a responsibility to ensure that those states that have taken responsibility for the welfare of their citizens do not offload that responsibility onto us. When we act as agents of the state we must not lose our ability to be critical of the state. In those countries where we provide essential services such as education and health without any finance from the state we have a responsibility to ensure that the poorest can take advantage of them.

Engaging with the Household

The household is the fundamental social unit in every society. In some societies the only members of the household are those who have family ties, in other societies more extended groups live in the same household and often offer a home to people with no family ties. The household is the first source of welfare in every society and so providing services in a way that strengthens the household and links it to its community and a corps must always be a

priority. The most sophisticated medical services are useless if the household does not support the patient in their compliance with the treatment. The best school is undermined if the household and the community do not value the education of that child. In working with households we need to ensure that private woes become public issues. Our work on HIV/AIDS internationally is an example of where we have mediated between the private problems of the household and a major public health issue. A key purpose of corps life is to support Salvationists in sustaining healthy and hospitable households

Households can have real difficulties in relating well to bureaucratic organisations. They can be suspicious that the bureaucracy is using them to meet its purposes. If The Salvation Army is to be a faithful bureaucracy it needs to invest heavily in the relational skills of its front line and to help them effectively bridge the private world of the household with the public world that can support and sustain it.

Engaging with NGOs and FBOs

NGOs and FBOs take donor funds and use them to deliver goods and services to people in line with their publicly stated purposes. The NGO mediates between the beneficiary and the donor and so has to be trusted to meet the needs of the beneficiaries whilst fulfilling the intentions of the donors. It is now common for donors to specify purposes that are more detailed than the general purposes of the organisation. This leads NGOs to shape beneficiary needs to fit donors' intentions rather than ask donors to trust them to work in partnership with beneficiaries⁹.

The Salvation Army has the potential to be a confident partner, knowing it can span sector boundaries and rationales without losing its ecclesial identity as an overflowing of grace from the life of the church into the life of the world.

If there is scope for engagement – how do we do it faithfully?

If The Salvation Army has the potential to engage, how can we make that engagement more faithful?

We need to be better at learning from our practice about what we believe and then being able to explain those beliefs when we decide in our boards and councils what we intend to do. If we are to be a credible church, faith-based organisation, faith-based enterprise and faith-based agent of the state we need to put those beliefs into a language the public can understand.

Here are some things which we could say and do that would make us more faithful partners:

⁹ The Third Lausanne Congress (2011). [The Cape Town Commitment: A Confession of Faith and a Call to Action](#), The Lausanne Movement. 'Let us finally prove that the Church does not operate on the principle that those who have the most money have all the decision-making power.' p66

- the equal dignity of all creatures lies at the heart of production and consumption of goods and services
- we serve people because they are of worth to God and not only as a means of enacting government policy
- We seek donors that trust beneficiaries to understand how God wishes them to flourish.
- The Bible is a public text to which we can bring our disagreements and engage in public reasoning. It is the basis for our discussions about the way forward.
- The Salvation Army is part of the household of faith. All members of that household are in partnership in the divine economy – all are stewards none are owners
- We affirm that our founders chose the bureaucracy as a means of church government in order to work with the whole person in a way that got to the heart of the matter rather than ameliorated symptoms. We will adapt our measures and organisational form when we discern we need to so that we can make a real difference to the world for which Christ died¹⁰.

My conclusion is that we need a clearer articulation of our polity – our form of governance – so that we can affirm and reform both ourselves and those with whom we engage. That will ensure we are not afraid to resist and rebel when the authorities with which we engage need unmasking and naming as penultimate and not yet fully realising God’s intentions for humanity.

The fact we know Lydia’s name suggests she achieved some prominence in the network of churches that Paul established. She started with what she had, a household of faith, and adapted. We can do nothing less.

¹⁰ The Salvation Army (2009). Building Deeper Relationships: A Guide to Faith-Based Facilitation. London, International Headquarters. There is now considerable experience of this as a good way to discern the way forward.