STUDY GUIDE ON

Sexism

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International Positional Statement on Sexism

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Sexism is discrimination based on sex or gender, most often against women and girls and is increasingly understood as a fundamental human rights issue.

Sexism often includes a combination of prejudice plus power. It is expressed through systemic, structured prejudice and cultural discrimination and can be present in a family, communities of faith, and societal and national cultures.

The Salvation Army believes that both male and female are made in the image of God and are equal in value and therefore is opposed to sexism. We reject any view that subordinates women to men, or men to women.

The Salvation Army believes that our world is enhanced by equitably valuing, equipping and mobilising all human beings. While valuing gender equity, The Salvation Army acknowledges with regret that Salvationists have sometimes conformed to societal and organisational norms that perpetuate sexism.

We are committed to model the equitable valuing, equipping and mobilising of men and women, and will speak into societies around the world where sexism exists.
Sexism is prejudice or discrimination based on sex or gender, especially against women and girls, and is increasingly perceived as a fundamental human rights issue.

Sexism is defined as ‘prejudice plus power.’

If the international moral challenge in the 19th century was slavery, and the 20th century was totalitarianism, this century it is projected to be ‘the struggle for gender equality.’

In Western democracies, sexism may be the pay gap or sexual harassment. However, for much of the developing world sexism can be deadly and makes for incomprehensible human cruelty.

The Salvation Army embodies a worldwide tradition of service without discrimination to the distressed, needy and marginalized. We commit to advocacy in the public domain on matters of social justice.

How are we to respond to sexism?
In the USA, women earn **83%** compared to similar male workers according to median hourly earnings. Thus, it takes an extra **9 WEEKS OF WORK** for WOMEN to earn what men do in the same year (Pew Research Center).

In the USA, 1:4 women will be sexually assaulted in their lifetime (US Bureau of Justice).

In China, 39,000 baby girls die annually because parents don’t give them the same medical care and attention that boys receive (Half the Sky).

In North Africa, Western Asia and parts of South Asia, women are regularly doused in kerosene and set ablaze, or burned with acid, for ‘disobedience’. So-called ‘honour killings’ take the lives of thousands of young women every year.

In Africa, the Middle East and Asia more than 200 million girls and women alive today have experience female genital mutilation in the 30 countries where the practice is concentrated (WHO).

Of the estimated 1.3 billion people living in poverty, more than 70% are female.

Globally, 1:3 women and girls are beaten or sexually abused in her lifetime (UN).

Women aged between 15-44 are more likely to be maimed or die from male violence than from cancer, malaria, traffic accidents, and war combined (Half The Sky).

100 million women are missing from the world who would have been here had it not been for sex-selective abortions targeting girls, honor killings, bride burnings, widespread neglect and infanticide of girl babies and children (Half The Sky).

600,000 to 800,000 people are trafficked across international borders every year – 80% are female, the majority for sexual purposes (US State Department).

In late 2017 the #MeToo movement gained worldwide attention in the aftermath of systemic entertainment industry sexual harassments charged by numerous prominent female actors. The issue received further prominence with the ‘Silence Breakers’ selected as the 2017 Time Magazine Person of the Year, women who spoke out against sexual assault and harassment.
Women are marginalized and exploited – economically, politically, and socially. Indeed, it may be fair to say that females are the most oppressed people group in the world.

The Salvation Army OTHERS program creates employment for women. A core concept is that purchased products create compensated work for women who otherwise have limited opportunities.

In the first (1886) edition of The Salvation Army Orders and Regulations for Field Officers we read: ‘In The Army men and women are alike eligible for all ranks, authorities, and duties, all positions being open to both alike.’

The Salvation Army has per capita more females in leadership than any other church, denomination, or Christian organization. There are currently over 17,000 active officers worldwide. 47% are male and 53% are female.

And yet, only 9.89 per cent of command appointments are held by women, and only 4.18 per cent held by married women (2019).
Genesis conveys the idea that man and woman are created to enjoy intimate community together. The ‘human’ is relieved from isolation and loneliness by the creation of woman.

It is evident that this void could not be filled by the presence of animals. A specifically female counterpart is the only antidote.

The creation of Eve from Adam’s rib reveals that God’s intention is that ‘she will be, unlike the animals, equal to him.’

In GN 2:18 woman is described as a ‘helper’ for man. Throughout the Old Testament, a ‘helper’ is one who rescues others in situations of need and is often attributed to God as our rescuer. The word denotes not domesticity or subordination, but competency and strength.

‘Eve was not taken from the feet of Adam to be his slave, nor from his head to be his lord, but from his side to be his partner.’ (Peter Lombard, AD 1157).

The domination of woman by man is due to the fall, not to the creation.

Amidst repeated examples of Old Testament marital brokenness, the original goodness of monogamous intimacy surfaces in Song of Songs. This can be imagined as Adam and Eve before the Fall.

First-century rabbis placed the responsibility for the inflammation of male sexual desire on the woman. The solution was therefore to avoid women, to segregate them, and to cover them up (Gushee and Stassen).

Jesus places responsibility for lust and adultery on the man. This is revolutionary.

Marriage provides the ultimate means by which male and female can empower each other. This is echoed in Paul’s declaration, ‘In the Lord, … woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman.’ (1 COR 11:11).
Husbands and wives are bonded in a relationship of non-hierarchical complementarity whereby each brings gifts in a relationship of shared leadership.

The title of ‘headship’ given to the husband reflects the idea of ‘source’ rather than ‘domination’. In other words, the husband takes the leadership in love.

From Genesis 1 onwards, the fundamental equality of the sexes is affirmed. God makes man and woman equal in dignity and status, giving authority and dominion over creation to both.

In Eden, Adam and Eve are jointly entrusted with the dual responsibility of populating the earth and managing the environment in a relationship of equal partnership, best defined as non-hierarchical complementarity.

Amidst repeated Old Testament patriarchal brokenness, the original working partnership surfaces in Proverbs 31 – a capable, industrious and honourable woman.

In politics, Rahab, Esther and Ruth alter the course of history.

The desire of women to develop themselves and use their gifts is fundamentally human. To deny or stifle this is oppression.

Female empowerment should not deny femininity, just as it should not deny masculinity for male leaders. For a woman to function as a leader must not mean that she become ‘like a man’.

‘It is only when women and men share their power that they will help one another grow, mature and be transformed into the full stature of Jesus Christ.’ (Ruth Haley Barton).
The relationship between men and women is the focus of forceful theological dialogue between complementarians and egalitarians.

Complementarians advocate a relational hierarchy that puts equality in the image of God together with the relational subordination of women to men.

Egalitarians assert that God’s original intention is male and female mutuality, and propose that a faithful, vibrant church needs the gifts of all God’s children operating at their fullest capacity.

It is important to think of the image of God in this matter because ‘God the Father’ is easily misinterpreted as meaning that God is stereotypically male. This diminishes the image of God in male and female.

In addition to the masculine images of God – King, Lord, Warrior, Lion, Shepherd – God is also pictured as mother, midwife, in labour, nursing, mother hen and a she-bear robbed of her cubs.

Amidst the Old Testament patriarchs, Miriam, Huldah and Deborah demonstrate the same kind of religious authority as men.

On the day of Pentecost, the outpouring of the Spirit includes both men and women, without differentiation to the ministry of prophecy (Bilezikian).

The Revelation image of Christ as the Bridegroom in relationship with the church as his bride is significant. Christ equipped and prepared his bride for ministry and then promised she would do greater works than him (Bescancon Spencer).

Christian community is never organizationally described as a gender-based hierarchy in the Scriptures. Rather, it is a community of oneness, summarized in Galatians 3:28 – ‘for you are all one in Christ.’

Secular feminism centres around competing for equal rights; biblical feminism centres around creating equal opportunities to serve:

- the secular feminist says, ‘women are entitled to compete on an equal basis with men.’
- the biblical feminist says, ‘women seek the freedom to follow Christ as he calls them to use their gifts in God’s service.’ (Biblical Feminism – Gretchen Gaebelein Hull).
Women experience systematic social injustice because of their gender. Two frequently referenced current examples include:

Mansplaining – when a man talks condescendingly to a woman with the mistaken assumption that he knows more about the subject than her.

Gaslighting – a form of mental abuse designed to plant self-doubt; a deliberate pattern of manipulation calculated to make the victim trust the perpetrator and doubt their own perceptions or sanity. It is frequently associated with male emotional abuse of a female.

‘Not listening to women is worldwide and as old as time. She tries to be heard. But too often her voice is ignored, belittled, mocked, critiqued, interrupted or shouted down.’ (Dame – Fiona Landers).

Studies of classrooms ranging from kindergarten through graduate school reveal that teachers are more likely to:

- call on male students, even when female students raise their hands,
- wait longer for male than for female students to respond to questions,
- give male students more eye contact.

The feminisation of poverty is a direct consequence of women’s unequal access to economic opportunities.

Women perform 66% of the world’s work, and produce 50% of the food, yet earn only 10% of the income and own 1% of the property.

The economic empowerment of women is a prerequisite for sustainable development and the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Women comparatively invest a higher proportion of their earnings in their families and communities. Increasing the role of women in the economy is a significant part of the solution to global financial growth (UN Development Co-operation Forum).
SOCIAL OUTCOMES

Confronting sexism has secured important benefits in the Western world, such as equal educational opportunities for women, better health care, women’s suffrage, and more equitable job opportunities.

It is generally acknowledged that women and men bring differing leadership styles and perspectives to the workplace.

More than being ‘politically correct’, women working alongside men increases effectiveness in production. This can provide a competitive edge.

How is it possible for a church to self-identify as a biblical community when more than half its constituency is excluded from significant aspects of its life? Surely, there is a loss of ‘production’ and ‘competitive edge’?

While advocating equal authority for men and women, The Salvation Army leadership model often functions along quite traditional gender roles, with men holding the dominant leadership positions. There appears to be a disparity between the espoused leadership theory and practical implementation.

The Salvation Army OTHERS program creates employment for women through micro-enterprise initiatives. A core concept is that purchased products create compensated work for women who otherwise have limited opportunity. When compensated they are empowered to provide food, medicine and send their children to school. Many women also learn how to run a business.
Discussion Points

1. In what settings do you see the ‘enmity’ described in Genesis 3 and the hierarchical mindset of undervaluing and demeaning females?

2. What pain have you experienced or seen as a result of sexism?

3. Discuss the statement: ‘It may be fair to say that females are the most oppressed people group in the world.’

4. Where have you seen or experienced the ‘synergy’ of males and females co-labouring in unity? Have you?

5. Men – In what settings do you experience a temptation to exclude women from authority, power and decision-making, or by ‘silencing’, ‘interrupting’ and ‘mansplaining’?

6. Women – In what settings do you experience a temptation to hold back, disengage or take a passive, secondary, comfortable role?

7. What specific suggestions or strategies do you have for The Salvation Army in countering sexism?

References

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Kristof and WuDunn, Half The Sky, Knoph, 2009
Ruth Haley Barton, Equal To The Task, IVP, 1998
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Others Trade for Hope – www.usatradeforhope.com
Home Base

GN 1:27
God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

GN 2:18
The LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.'

GN 2:20-24
For Adam no suitable helper was found. [21] So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. [22] Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. [23] The man said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman, for she was taken out of man.' [24] For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

GN 3:14-16
The Lord God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this, [...] I will put enmity between you and the woman [...] To the woman he said [...] Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.'

SONG 6:3
I am my lover’s, and my lover is mine.

1 COR 7:2-4
Each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. [3] The husband should fulfil his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. [4] The wife’s body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband’s body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife.

ROM 16:3-5
Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. [4] They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. [5] Greet also the church that meets at their house.

EPH 5:21
Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.
PS 68:11
The Lord gives the command; the women who proclaim the good tidings are a great host.

1 COR 11:11-12
In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. [12] For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.

ROM 16
10 women are affirmed amongst 28 specific people – Phoebe, Priscilla, Mary, Junia, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, Persis, Rufus’s mother, Julia, Nereus’s sister.

ACTS 2:17-18
In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. [18] Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.

JOEL 2:28
And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.

ACTS 21:8-9
Philip the evangelist… had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.

GAL 3:28
There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

EPH 5:31-32
‘[…] the two will become one flesh.’ [32] This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.
**Jesus & Women**

Woman at the well – religious conversation (JN 4).
Mary sitting at his feet – discipleship posture (LK 10).
Woman caught in adultery (JN 8).
Public conversation with widow of Nain (LK 7).
Public conversation with woman with bleeding disorder – (LK 8).
Public conversation with woman bent over for 18 years – ‘Daughter of Abraham’ (LK 13).
Woman anointing his feet – ‘Do you see this woman?’ (LK 7:44).
Women present at crucifixion – who had ‘cared for his needs’ (MK 15).
Women first receive the news of the resurrection - (MT 28, MK 16, LK 24, JN 20).

**Paul & Women**

Priscilla – affirmed as teacher (ACTS 18).
Lydia – affirmed as entrepreneur (ACTS 16).
Euodia and Syntyche – affirmed as fellow workers (PHL 3).
Phoebe – affirmed as a deacon (ROM 16).
Junia – affirmed as apostle (ROM 16).
Mutual submission – affirmed for husbands and wives (EPH 5).
Unity in Christ – affirmed for men and women (Gal 3).
Public prayer and prophecy – affirmed for women (1 COR 11).

Note: Paul’s non-discriminatory, Spirit-given theology and practice of ministry is given precedence over his 3 regulatory comments (1 COR 11:3-16, 14:34,35 and 1 TIM 2:11-14) dealing with specific problems in some first-century churches in a patriarchal culture. (Priscilla Papers – Kevin Giles, 2003)