

The Salvation Army
International Positional Statement

THE USE OF POWER

STATEMENT OF POSITION

The Salvation Army believes that power is neither good nor evil in itself. It is, rather, the purposes to which power is applied and the manner in which it is used that define its character.

As a Christian church, The Salvation Army believes that almighty God always exercises his power for righteous purposes.

As an extension of this, The Salvation Army believes that power, whether it is economic, emotional, legal, physical, political, psychological, religious or social, should always be exercised so as to promote the values of the Kingdom of God, such as love, justice and mutual respect. It should never be used for manipulation or exploitation.

The Salvation Army strongly opposes any use of power that is oppressive, cruel or corrupt, or that denies human rights [1].

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Power is the possession of command, control, or influence over others. Although the presence and importance of power is frequently denied, ignored or minimised, all individuals, institutions, businesses and nations have power. It is a means by which they achieve some of the world's most positive goods and some of the world's most horrifying evils. Consequently, an informed understanding of the proper use and potential for abuse of power is essential.

FOUNDATIONS FOR THE POSITION OF THE SALVATION ARMY

Christians understand that God intends human beings to have rights and responsibilities, which are meaningless unless people have the power to exercise them. This applies to nations, corporations and religious bodies as well as individuals. However, the longing for absolute and unaccountable power is a mark of sin (Matthew 20:20-28; Mark 9:33-37). This longing is a sign of our deep and sinful desire to be independent from God and dominate others. Behind it is the mistaken assumption that we will be content only when we are in full control. Scripture teaches that we are to set aside the lust for power and ambition in favour of a servant's heart (John 13:1-20; Philippians 2:5-11), and that our true happiness is found in the conformity of our will to God's will (1 Peter 4:2; 1 John 2:17).

The Salvation Army's understanding of the use of power is shaped most profoundly by Jesus, who is both ruler of all and servant of all (Philippians 2: 6-11).

Along with the example of Jesus, there are Scriptural principles that help elucidate the proper use of power, especially the following:

- Power is given by God, and we are accountable for its use (John 19:10-11).
- In the use of power, we all bear a responsibility to act for the benefit of those in need and to confront the abuse of power (Proverbs 31:8-9; Isaiah 1:17; Jeremiah 22:3).
- Power should be exercised in a spirit of love (Ephesians 6:4), to empower others (Ephesians 4:11-12).
- Power that is entrusted for the common good is to be employed for the common good (1 Kings 3:9; 1 Corinthians 12:7).
- The appropriate use of power presumes an attitude of humility toward God and one's fellow man (Numbers 12:3; 1 Kings 21:29; Matthew 18:4; Mark 10:42-45; Philippians 2:3; 1 Peter 5:5). In the absence of such humility, the use of power will likely be driven solely by human selfishness and thereby become a sinful abuse of power (2 Samuel 12; Jeremiah 23:10; Micah 3:9-12; Acts 5:1-10).
- To fail to use the power one is given may itself be wrong, for abandonment risks exposing to harm and exploitation those for whom one is responsible (Ezekiel 34:8; Matthew 9:36).

PRACTICAL RESPONSES

1. Consistent with its theology and history, The Salvation Army continually seeks opportunities to bring relief and justice to people who are suffering, poor, marginalised and oppressed.
2. The Salvation Army seeks to empower those whose power is constrained, and it employs its people, resources and influence at every level of society and government so as to improve the lives of men, women and children who would otherwise remain neglected, isolated, and unaware of the love of God.
3. The Salvation Army seeks to help people discover, develop and enjoy their God-given capacities for abundant living. This is one of the principal objectives of its evangelistic mission and social programmes. It is an outcome sought, for example, through congregational life; centres helping the victims of abuse; schools offering education opportunities for children; and health and community centres providing places for healing and wholeness.
4. The Bible is instructive on the nature and use of power and informs The Salvation Army's thinking, but many who do not accept the authority of Scripture nonetheless believe power should be used with accountability, humility, love and justice. They may welcome the opportunity to form common cause with The Salvation Army in its opposition to the misuse of power.
5. Through such bodies as The Salvation Army International Social Justice Commission, the urgent needs of powerless people are impressed upon world leaders. Through the development of its relationship with the United Nations, The Salvation Army engages with those who can effect

policies and programmes that will ease the burdens on and enrich the lives of millions around the world.

6. The Salvation Army supports and cooperates with efforts to recognise human rights, root out corruption in business and government, promote fair trade, and preserve and protect the environment. Through micro-credit, trading and other initiatives The Salvation Army seeks to promote economic justice for those who would otherwise be unable to earn a living.
7. The Salvation Army is pledged to use its own power wisely and well in relation to all who receive its services, who belong to it, who work for it or who collaborate in its mission.

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The views expressed in the above international positional statement constitute the official position of The Salvation Army on the issue addressed, and they may not be modified or adapted in any way without the express written permission of International Headquarters.

[1]The Salvation Army affirms the definition of human rights as contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.