

THE SALVATION ARMY IN
THE BODY OF CHRIST

AN ECCLESIOLOGICAL STATEMENT

**A statement issued by the International Headquarters
of The Salvation Army by authority of the General,
in consultation with the International Doctrine Council
and the International Management Council**



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IN THE BODY OF
CHRIST

An Ecclesiological Statement



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FOREWORD

I am pleased and privileged to introduce to Salvationists everywhere this Statement of where The Salvation Army stands within the Body of Christ. It has been through multiple stages of preparation and I record deep thanks to the many who have contributed to it, not least the members of the International Doctrine Council under their Chairperson, Commissioner William Francis, and the members of the International Management Council at International Headquarters in London. Both of these Councils, by reason of their multi-ethnic memberships, represent attitudes and insights of a global nature.

The Statement is intended to be useful to all Salvationists in understanding our place among the many churches, denominations, para-church bodies, church councils and other Christian groups that exist around the world. It will be especially useful to those of us who are actively engaged in ecumenical relations and can readily be shared with others beyond our ranks if this will be an aid to mutual understanding. The Statement is not intended to say new things, but its purpose is to clarify and consolidate present global thinking on our identity within the wider Body of Christ.

May God bless and use this short publication to his lasting glory and may the Army always be ready to obey his leadings, remaining a permanent mission to the unconverted as well as a modern, even unique, expression of church life.

Shaw Clifton
General
April 2008





SUMMARY STATEMENT

1. The Body of Christ on earth (also referred to in this paper as the Church universal) comprises all believers in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.
2. Believers stand in a spiritual relationship to one another, which is not dependent upon any particular church structure.
3. The Salvation Army, under the one Triune God, belongs to and is an expression of the Body of Christ on earth, the Church universal, and is a Christian denomination in permanent mission to the unconverted, called into and sustained in being by God.
4. Denominational diversity is not self-evidently contrary to God's will for his people.
5. Inter-denominational harmony and co-operation are to be actively pursued for they are valuable for the enriching of the life and witness of the Body of Christ in the world and therefore of each denomination.
6. The Salvation Army welcomes involvement with other Christians in the many lands where the Army is privileged to witness and serve.





AMPLIFIED STATEMENT

The Body of Christ on Earth

1. *WE BELIEVE* that the Church, the Body of Christ on earth, often referred to in the New Testament as ‘the saints’ (*hoi hagioi* – Ephesians 1:23), comprises all who are born not of natural descent, nor of human decision, or a husband’s will, but born of God (John 1:13). The Church universal includes all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, confessing him as Saviour and Lord, and witnessing to that sacred commitment through loving mutual submission (Matthew 18:15-20; John 13:34-35; Ephesians 5:21) and sacrificial service (Mark 8:34; Matthew 20:25-28; John 13:1-17).

WE DO NOT BELIEVE that the Church universal depends for its existence or validity upon any particular ecclesiastical structure, any particular form of worship, or any particular observance of ritual.

2. *WE BELIEVE* that the Church universal is the whole of the worshipping, witnessing Christian community throughout the centuries

comprised of whatever groupings, large or small, accepted or persecuted, wealthy or poor, into which her members may have been gathered in the past or in the present.

WE DO NOT BELIEVE that an adequate definition of the Body of Christ on earth, the Church universal, can be confined in terms of ecclesiastical structure, but must rather be stated in terms of a spiritual relationship of grace that must find expression in all ecclesiastical structures. Members of the Body are those who are incorporate in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1:1) and therefore reconciled to God through his Son. All such are in a spiritual relationship one with the other, which begins and continues regardless of externals, according to the prayer of Jesus that those who are his may be one (John 17:23). These words of Jesus ask for a oneness as is found in the oneness of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This oneness is spiritual, not organizational.

3. *WE BELIEVE* that The Salvation Army belongs to, and is a particular communion of, the Church universal and a representative of the Body of Christ. Christ is the True Vine (John 15:1) and all believers are his living, fruit-bearing branches, exhorted by Scripture to live in Christlike unity (1 Corinthians 12:12).

WE DO NOT BELIEVE that any community made up of true followers of Christ can rightly be regarded as outside the Church universal, whatever their history, customs or practices when compared with those of other Christian communities. God alone knows those who are truly his (2 Timothy 2:19).

Denominational Variety

4. *WE BELIEVE* that God's dealings with his people are perfect according to his will, but that human responses are imperfect and prone to error. It may be God's dealings or fallible human responses to those dealings which have brought about the rich and varied denominational tapestry discernible today.

WE DO NOT BELIEVE that denominational or organizational variety can automatically and in every case be said to be contrary to God's will for his people.

5. *WE BELIEVE* that God raised up The Salvation Army according to his purposes for his glory and for the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.

WE DO NOT BELIEVE that The Salvation Army's existence as an independent and

distinctive Christian church, having no formal, structural ties with other Christian churches, is an affront to the gospel of Jesus Christ or self-evidently contrary to God's will for the whole of his Body on earth.

6. *WE BELIEVE* that the practices of The Salvation Army have much in common with the practices of other churches, but that being raised up by God for a distinctive work, the Army has been led of God to adopt the following combination of characteristics:

- a) its emphasis upon personal religion and individual spiritual regeneration through faith in Christ leading in turn to a commitment in mission to seek to win others to Christ;
- b) its commitment to the unceasing proclamation of the gospel and its insistence that this gospel is for the whosoever;
- c) its teaching concerning sanctification and holy living;
- d) its teaching that the receiving of inward spiritual grace is not dependent upon any particular outward observance;

- e) its worldwide tradition of service (arising out of the compassionate love of Christ for all persons) without discrimination or preconditions, to the distressed, needy and marginalised, together with appropriate advocacy in the public domain on matters of social justice;
- f) its willingness to obey the 'great commission' of Jesus Christ, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, by ongoing expansion of Salvationist witness and service into new countries, with a consequential celebration, with thanksgiving to God, of its internationalism;
- g) its preference for non-liturgical and flexible forms of worship, seeking to encourage spontaneity, for example in prayer and in spoken personal witness and testimony;
- h) its tradition of inviting public response to the presentation of the gospel message, and its use of the mercy seat for this and other spiritual purposes;
- i) its focus, in self-expression, on the biblical military metaphor of living in the world and of serving God as soldiers of Jesus Christ (2 Timothy 2:3; Ephesians 6:11-17);

- j) its requirement that adults and children wishing to become full members (soldiers and junior soldiers), and thereby wishing to make a commitment to formal membership of the Body of Christ on earth, should publicly confess their faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, the children making a simple statement of faith with promises as to lifestyle and the primary spiritual disciplines (see page 19), and the adults entering into formal doctrinal and ethical commitments, the latter focusing on the sacredness of human relationships, but including also the personal disciplines of abstention from alcohol, tobacco, and non-medical use of addictive drugs (see page 21);
- k) its wearing of distinctive uniforms as a witness to belonging to Christ and as a signal of availability to others;
- l) its encouragement into Salvation Army fellowship of those who do not wish to enter into the full commitment of soldiership (see j above), but are willing to become adherent members as a step in the journey of faith;
- m) its recognition of the equal place within the Body of Christ of men and women in

all aspects of Christian service, ministry and leadership including the holding of ecclesiological authority;

- n) its readiness to use all forms of musical expression in worship and evangelism, and its encouragement in many cultures of the indigenisation of worship expressions and styles.

WE DO NOT BELIEVE it to be self-evidently God's will for his people in the Army that they cast aside in haste the leadings of God or the blessings of the years, but rather, in humility, to value them, learn from them, and harness and adapt them for ongoing relevance in future witness and service.

The Local Church

- 7. *WE BELIEVE* that just as the true Church universal comprises all who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, so each denominational church comprises a community of believers who have in common the way the Lord, through the Holy Spirit, has dealt with them as a community. In turn, each denominational church comprises local congregations regularly meeting together for worship, fellowship and service in a relatively confined geographical location.

WE DO NOT BELIEVE that the validity of a denomination or its local congregations depends upon any particular ecclesiastical tradition, structure, hierarchy, form of worship, or ritual. Where even two or three gather in Christ's name there he is present (Matthew 18:20) with a presence no less real than that discerned in larger, more formal, ceremonial or liturgical settings.

The Army's Identity

8. *WE BELIEVE* that The Salvation Army is an international Christian church in permanent mission to the unconverted, and is an integral part of the Body of Christ like other Christian churches, and that the Army's local corps are local congregations like the local congregations of other Christian churches. The Army springs from the Methodist Revival and has remained unassimilated by any other denomination. Like other reformers before him, William Booth did not intentionally set out to found a new denomination. However, through the years Salvationism has moved on in its emerging self-perception, and in the perceptions of others, from being a para-church evangelistic revival movement (at first known as The Christian Mission) to being a Christian church with a

permanent mission to the unsaved and the marginalised. Salvationists remain comfortable in being known simply as ‘the Army’, or a ‘mission’, or a ‘movement’, or for certain purposes as a ‘charity’. All of these descriptors can be used alongside ‘church’. With this multi-faceted identity the Army is welcomed to, and takes its place at, the ecumenical table at local, national and international levels.

WE DO NOT BELIEVE that The Salvation Army’s history, structures, practices or beliefs permit it to be understood as anything other than a distinct Christian denomination with a purpose to fulfil and a calling to discharge under God. Similarly, its local corps cannot properly be understood unless seen primarily as local church congregations meeting regularly by grace and in Christ’s name for worship, fellowship and service. Typically a local Army congregation will offer an integrated and holistic ministry, with both spiritual and social service dimensions, to the local population. Commissioned officers (both men and women) of The Salvation Army are duly ordained Christian leaders and ministers of the Christian gospel, called by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit to preach and teach biblical, apostolic truth (Acts 2:42), and to serve others in the name of Christ and for his sake.

The Army and Other Churches

9. *WE BELIEVE* that it is God's will that harmonious relations are built up and sustained, by divine grace, between Christians everywhere and between all Christian denominations including their local congregations. The Army's numerous and widespread contacts with other Christian communities around the world serve to enrich the Army and to enhance its understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit. For this reason the Army welcomes such contacts and seeks cordially to extend and deepen them.

WE DO NOT BELIEVE that narrowness or exclusiveness are consistent with God's will for his people, or that God has nothing to teach us by our sharing and co-operating with his people in other denominations. As in humility we learn from others, also we come to the ecumenical table ready to share whatever God in his wisdom has graciously bestowed upon the Army.

10. *WE BELIEVE* that every visible expression of the Church universal is endowed with its own blessings and strengths as gifts from God. We respect and admire those strengths, recognising too that because of human frailty every such

expression, including The Salvation Army, has its imperfections.

WE DO NOT BELIEVE it is our task to comment negatively upon, or to undermine, the traditions of other denominations, and certainly not in relation to the sacraments (on which our distinctive, though not unique, position sees the whole of life as a sacrament with a calling from God to Salvationists to witness to a life of sanctity without formal sacraments). It is contrary to our practices to offer adverse comment upon the life of any denomination or local congregation. We seek to be careful not to belittle the doctrines or practices of any other Christian group. The Army places emphasis in its teaching not upon externals but upon the need for each believer personally to experience that inward spiritual grace to which an external observance testifies. We maintain that no external observance can rightly be said to be essential to salvation or to the receiving of divine grace and that the biblical truth is that we can meet with God and receive his grace anywhere at any time through faith. We recognise that external observances such as baptism and eucharist are used in many denominations as a means of grace. We believe that our calling into sanctity without sacraments is not a contradiction of the ways of

other churches, but is something beautiful for Christ, to be held in creative tension with the equally beautiful, but very different, practices of other denominations. In the overall economy of God there are no inherent contradictions, but there are creative paradoxes.

11. *WE BELIEVE* that The Salvation Army was called into being by the will of God, is sustained in being by God's grace, and is empowered for obedience by the Holy Spirit. Its overriding purpose as encapsulated in the name God has given us – The Salvation Army – is therefore to strive to lead men and women and boys and girls into saving faith in Jesus Christ, working tirelessly and for Christ's sake, to develop them in holy living, that they might better serve suffering humanity while remaining unpolluted by the world (James 1:26, 27).

WE DO NOT BELIEVE that we alone are called to these sacred and awesome tasks, and therefore we rejoice exceedingly because in other Christian churches we find co-workers for God.

NOTE:

For Salvationist acceptance of the historic Christian creeds (The Apostles' Creed, The Nicene Creed, The Athanasian Creed) see *Salvation Story – Salvationist Handbook of Doctrine* (The Salvation Army, London, 1998).







APPENDIX

THE SALVATION ARMY'S ARTICLES OF FAITH

We believe that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were given by inspiration of God, and that they only constitute the Divine rule of Christian faith and practice.

We believe that there is only one God, who is infinitely perfect, the Creator, Preserver, and Governor of all things, and who is the only proper object of religious worship.

We believe that there are three persons in the Godhead – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, undivided in essence and co-equal in power and glory.

We believe that in the person of Jesus Christ the Divine and human natures are united, so that he is truly and properly God and truly and properly man.

We believe that our first parents were created in a state of innocency, but by their disobedience, they lost their purity and happiness, and that in

consequence of their fall, all men have become sinners, totally depraved, and as such are justly exposed to the wrath of God.

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ has by his suffering and death made an atonement for the whole world so that whosoever will may be saved.

We believe that repentance toward God, faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and regeneration by the Holy Spirit are necessary to salvation.

We believe that we are justified by grace through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and that he that believeth hath the witness in himself.

We believe that continuance in a state of salvation depends upon continued obedient faith in Christ.

We believe that it is the privilege of all believers to be wholly sanctified, and that their whole spirit and soul and body may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We believe in the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body, in the general judgment at the end of the world, in the eternal happiness of the righteous, and in the endless punishment of the wicked.



JUNIOR SOLDIER'S PROMISE

Having asked God for forgiveness, I will be his loving and obedient child. Because Jesus is my Saviour from sin, I will trust him to keep me good, and will try to help others to follow him. I promise to pray, to read my Bible and, by his help, to lead a life that is clean in thought, word and deed. I will not smoke, take harmful drugs or drink alcoholic drinks.







SOLDIER'S COVENANT

*Promises made when becoming a soldier in
The Salvation Army*

HAVING accepted Jesus Christ as my Saviour and Lord, and desiring to fulfil my membership of his Church on earth as a soldier of The Salvation Army, I now by God's grace enter into a sacred covenant.

I **believe** and will live by the truths of the word of God expressed in The Salvation Army's eleven articles of faith:

We **believe** that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were given by inspiration of God: and that they only constitute the Divine rule of Christian faith and practice.

We **believe** that there is only one God, who is infinitely perfect, the Creator, Preserver, and Governor of all things, and who is the only proper object of religious worship.

We **believe** that there are three persons in the Godhead – the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, undivided in essence and co-equal in power and glory.

We believe that in the person of Jesus Christ the Divine and human natures are united, so that he is truly and properly God and truly and properly man.

We believe that our first parents were created in a state of innocency, but by their disobedience they lost their purity and happiness; and that in consequence of their fall all men have become sinners, totally depraved. and as such are justly exposed to the wrath of God.

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ has, by his suffering and death, made an atonement for the whole world so that whosoever will may be saved.

We believe that repentance towards God, faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and regeneration by the Holy Spirit are necessary to salvation.

We believe that we are justified by grace, through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ; and that he that believeth hath the witness in himself.

We believe that continuance in a state of salvation depends upon continued obedient faith in Christ.

We believe that it is the privilege of all believers to be wholly sanctified, and that their whole spirit and soul and body may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We believe in the immortality of the soul; in the resurrection of the body; in the general judgment at the end of the world; in the eternal happiness of the righteous; and in the endless punishment of the wicked.

THEREFORE

I will be responsive to the Holy Spirit's work and obedient to his leading in my life, growing in grace through worship, prayer, service and the reading of the Bible.

I will make the values of the Kingdom of God and not the values of the world the standard for my life.

I will uphold Christian integrity in every area of my life, allowing nothing in thought, word or deed that is unworthy, unclean, untrue, profane, dishonest or immoral.

I will maintain Christian ideals in all my relationships with others: my family and neighbours, my colleagues and fellow Salvationists, those to whom and for whom I am responsible, and the wider community.

I will uphold the sanctity of marriage and of family life.

I will be a faithful steward of my time and gifts, my money and possessions, my body, my mind and my spirit, knowing that I am accountable to God.

I will abstain from alcoholic drink, tobacco, the non-medical use of addictive drugs, gambling, pornography, the occult, and all else that could enslave the body or spirit.

I will be faithful to the purposes for which God raised up The Salvation Army, sharing the good news of Jesus Christ, endeavouring to win others to him, and in his name caring for the needy and the disadvantaged.

I will be actively involved, as I am able, in the life, work, worship and witness of the corps, giving as large a proportion of my income as possible to support its ministries and the worldwide work of the Army.

I will be true to the principles and practices of The Salvation Army, loyal to its leaders, and I will show the spirit of Salvationism whether in times of popularity or persecution.

I now call upon all present to witness that I enter into this covenant and sign these articles of war of my own free will, convinced that the love of Christ, who died and now lives to save me, requires from me

this devotion of my life to his service for the salvation of the whole world; and therefore do here declare my full determination, by God's help, to be a true soldier of The Salvation Army.







OFFICER'S COVENANT

MY COVENANT

Called by God to proclaim the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ as an officer of The Salvation Army, I bind myself to him in this solemn covenant: to love and serve him supremely all my days, to live to win souls and make their salvation the first purpose of my life, to care for the poor, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, love the unlovable, and befriend those who have no friends, to maintain the doctrines and principles of The Salvation Army, and, by God's grace, to prove myself a worthy officer.

Done in the strength of my Lord and Saviour, and in the presence of *[the following wording to be adapted to local circumstances]* the Territorial Commander, training college officers and fellow cadets.

