This is my final paper at this symposium. In my previous three papers, I have emphasised the importance of human rights for the future of the world and the current threats we are facing. The second paper suggested ways for human rights to be strengthened by working with religious people and organisations like the Church to improve the lives of all people. The third paper examined on specific way to do this by supporting Agenda 2030 and working towards the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

This final paper specifically addresses the resources available to Christians as we try to be faithful. We will focus on building up the capacity of Christians and the Church to support the fight for human rights. This is essential work. For Christians and the Church to be effective in serving the world, Christians need to focus on being what God want them to be; doing what God wants them to do. By studying the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, we can understand God’s mission to the world and what it means for how we live today.

Some of Jesus’ most important teaching is recorded in Matthew chapters 5 to 7. This short section of the Bible is called the Sermon on the Mount. There are 111 verses in these three chapters that include many well-known sayings of Jesus. For example,

- Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God
- You are the salt of the earth
- You are the light of the world
- You have heard that it was said, “Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.” But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.
- Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you
- Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way as you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

There are many more life-changing instructions in the Sermon on the Mount. Part of that teaching is a well know prayer known as The Lord’s Prayer. It would be better described as the Disciples’ Prayer because Jesus set out the priorities for how disciples should pray:
And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. This, then, is how you should pray:

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”

If you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. (Matthew 6: 7-15).

It is a prayer to help people like us who need to pray it! It is a prayer for people like us who need to live out our faith. The prayer is deceptively simple. The simplicity is important – there is a danger of making everything too complicated. In Jesus’ day, some of the religious people loved to pray complex, ‘showing off’ prayers. Jesus teaches his disciples to be simple (not simplistic). The Lord’s Prayer has great depth – we will only focus on one small part of that prayer – ‘Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven’.

1. **Thy Kingdom Come**

The coming of the Kingdom was a central part of Jesus’ teaching. Jesus was a radical, disruptive leader. Too often Jesus is seen by people today to be mild and inoffensive. This is wrong. The religious and political leaders were right to fear Jesus. He was a dangerous menace as far as they were concerned. His message was revolutionary – the coming of a new Kingdom meant the old Kingdom was to be overthrown. In the prayer Jesus taught his disciples, the first request to God in the prayer is ‘Thy Kingdom Come’. So, when we pray the Lord’s prayer, we are asking God to help us be like Jesus – disruptive, radical change agents. Are we ready for this? To seek justice together will almost certainly result in conflict and unpopularity. Standing up for the rights of other humans is definitely a Christ-like action but it inevitably results in conflict with the powerful.

We should not be afraid of living out Jesus’ radical message. When people realise the radical character of Jesus they are often attracted by it. The problem is that Christians and the church have domesticated the revolutionary Jesus – his message has lost its radical edge. Christians must recapture the true, undiluted message of Jesus when we support human rights. Every advocate for human rights is motivated by a sense of injustice. Life is not fair for many people and we all need to work together to make it better. Jesus came to Earth to fight injustice and offer salvation to everyone.

However, there is a problem here for many secular, liberal human rights advocates. Christians believe Jesus came to Earth to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29). Sin is an unpopular word these days. People do not like to be told they are sinners. This is a predictable outcome of our post-modern, secular society. If, as many people believe, there is no ultimate source of truth then how can there be sin? This is a reasonable conclusion if there is no God. However, Christians believe Jesus is the embodiment of truth. Jesus lived the perfect live but none of us are Jesus. All of us contributed to the brokenness of the world in the way we behave, the way we think and feel. Therefore, everyone is a sinner. Sin is at the root of injustice (Ezekiel 9:9). Injustice flourishes
outside the Kingdom of God resulting in people missing out on the fullness of life that God intends for us (John 10:10).

Praying ‘Thy Kingdom come’ acknowledges that God’s Kingdom is not fully established in this world. There are still vast parts of our world in rebellion. When we pray ‘thy Kingdom come’ we are promising to stop being rebellious and we are inviting God’s Kingdom to rule in every part of our lives. When acknowledges that everything in the entire cosmos belongs to God – including the areas where we have control. We voluntarily give up control to gain the freedom offered in Christ.

This is another key aspect of God’s Kingdom – we give up our power and in doing so find real freedom. Every person has power. You all have power. You have the power to come into this room today. You have the power to walk out if you wish. Of course, some people have more power, and some people have little power, but no person is powerless. Even the prisoner condemned to death has power over their attitudes and actions. We must be wise stewards of the power at our disposal and always remember that the source of all life-giving power is God. God has given every person the right to choose how they will live. When we pray ‘thy Kingdom come’ we are seeking to align our power with the power of God.

So how do we know that the Kingdom of God has come? Jesus was asked about this by some Pharisees. Jesus gave an interesting reply, "The Kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the Kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21, NIV).

This is important. The kingdoms of this world are evaluated by size of population, the value of the Gross Domestic Product; the size of the military. The Kingdom of God is different. It is within you and me – the Kingdom of God expands each time people see the world with the eyes of God, when people live according to God’s priorities and not our own. The Kingdom is within us and flows out of us. One of the most important ways of seeing evidence of the Kingdom is in the quality of our relationships. As I mentioned yesterday, people of the Kingdom of God produce the fruit of the Spirit in our relationships as St Paul described: ‘the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control’ (Galatians 5: 22 and 23). Our world needs more of this Kingdom! Our world needs less of the fruit of the godless kingdom St Paul describes earlier in Galatians 5

19 The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

When we pray thy Kingdom come, we are rejecting these behaviours and promising to seek the fruit of the Spirit.

2. Thy will be done
The next line in the prayer is ‘thy will be done’. So what do we mean by ‘thy will be done’?
Christians believe in an ultimate purpose for this life – doing God’s will. This is an idea under serious challenge. As noted already at this symposium, there are increasing numbers of people who reject all forms of absolute truth. We live in a post-truth world. How can there be God’s will if there is no God? As I mentioned in the first paper, post truth is the fruit of decades of individualism. If I feel something is true, it is true. I can create truth. Post truth flourishes in the vacuum created by atheism. If there is no God, why should there be an external definition of truth. It logically flows that individuals who are autonomous and rational should define their own truth. Who has the right to determine what is true? Me and me alone. This is our new world. Post truth. Post God. Post Human Rights.

The Lord’s Prayer is radically different to post-truth. Christians submit to the will of God when we pray the Lord’s prayer. We acknowledge that there is a purpose greater than ourselves. The Greek word for this is telos. Telos means our ‘ultimate goal or aim’. For people of faith our personal goals and ambitions are set aside in the interest of God’s overall purpose.

The telos of God for creation is set out in Ephesians 1: 8-10

With all wisdom and understanding, 9 God made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, 10 to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfilment – to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

This is the purpose of the Kingdom of God – to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. Unity is the telos of God, and therefore disunity, fragmentation and discord is the opposition. Where ever we find brokenness and selfish attitudes and actions this is opposed to the will of God.

So when we pray ‘thy will be done’ we are committing to building a fair, interconnected, united world. A world full of healthy people – in body, mind, soul – who live in a healthy planet. Building deeper relationships is at the heart of God’s purpose. The Salvation Army’s Handbook of Doctrine makes our purpose clear:

‘All our activities, practical, social and spiritual, arise out of our basic conviction of the reality of the love of God and our desire to see all people brought into relationship with him. … Our doctrine reminds us that salvation is holistic: the work of the Holy Spirit touches all areas of our life and personality, our physical, emotional and spiritual well-being, our relationships with our families and with the world around us.’

When we pray ‘thy will be done’ we are committing to being part of this great mission of God to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth.

3. On Earth as it is in Heaven

This brings us to the final part of the prayer – on earth as it is in heaven. Remember the telos of God is to bring unity to all things in heaven and earth. Too many Christians have the wrong idea about heaven and earth. Many preachers emphasis the purpose of salvation is for people to have their souls saved so we can escape earth and go to heaven when we die. This is an inadequate understanding of the boundless salvation that God plans for his creation – and every person.

The purpose of Jesus’s life, teaching, death, resurrection and second coming is to bring together heaven and earth (Ephesians 1:10). We are not going to heaven and leaving earth behind. Jesus is coming back. Many in the Church have stopped talking about the second coming of Jesus. Jesus will come back to this earth. We need to care for this earth because it is the only one we have and one day Jesus will return.

We must be very careful to avoid creating a false division between heaven and earth. Dualism has been a problem in the church from the very beginning. It is alive and well in too many parts of The Salvation Army. Some people focus on the soul and ignore the body. Others focus on the body and ignore the soul and spiritual life. We make a big mistake if we act as if the body is for this earth and the soul is bound for heaven. This is wrong and leads to heretical dualism. Jesus is coming back – heaven and earth will be united.

Therefore, caring for the Earth must be an essential part of the mission of the Church and of every Christian. This is one reason why I am excited about the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2030. When we seek to protect the environment we are not getting involved in liberal politics – we are being true to Biblical teaching and preparing this earth for the return of Christ and the uniting of heaven and earth.

When we pray ‘thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on Earth...’ we are resolving not to ignore the suffering of other people. We cannot ignore the destruction of the planet. We are promising to fight for the human rights of people who are poor and marginalised from the powerful in society.

The work we are called to do on Earth is all part of living out the Lord’s Prayer. Christians can bear witness to the Kingdom of God through all our daily activities. Professor NT Wright explains:

> What you do with your body in the present matters because God has a great future in store for it...
> What you do in the present – by painting, preaching, singing, sewing, praying, teaching, building hospitals, digging wells, campaigning for justice, writing poems, caring for the needy, loving your neighbour as yourself – will last into God’s future. These activities are not simply ways of making the present life a little less beastly, a little more bearable, until the day when we leave it behind altogether...
> They are part of what we may call building for God’s Kingdom.

It is not just what we do as individuals that counts in the Kingdom of God. Christians must speak out against systems and structures in our world that perpetuate injustice and cause people to suffer. One of my great concerns is the future of the world economy. The rich are personally getting much richer while the vast majority of the rest of us are seeing our standard of living stagnate or even decline. God created the systems, structures and organisations of this world. Like the rest of the world, organisations, systems and structures are fallen, broken and cause suffering.

A very helpful book, published in English in 2016, explains the implications of the fall nature of the world’s systems. It is called ‘Advocating for Justice – An Evangelical Vision for Transforming Systems and Structures’.³

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2 Wright, 2008, 193.
3 Offutt, Stephen; Bronkema, David; Vaillencourt Murphy, Krisanne; Davis, Robb; Okesson, Gregg; ‘Advocating for Justice – An Evangelical Vision for Transforming Systems and Structures’ Baker Academic, 2016.
The authors argue that not just individuals and the planet is fallen. The ‘powers and principalities of this world’ who are also fallen. They write:

> God has given these institutions (states, corporations, non-profits, churches, etc) for good and that despite their current fallenness, they too are part of God’s redemptive plan... in speaking before them we are bearing witness to the truth that God desires their good contribution, and we are challenging them to fulfil their God-given role.⁴

Three broad themes emerge in the writing of Paul on the subject of power: Walter Wink summarises: ‘the powers are good, the powers are fallen, the powers will be redeemed’.⁵ Christians are called to fight for the saving of people and also the saving of our institutions – including fighting for the salvation of the Church including The Salvation Army.

**Conclusion**

As I conclude this paper, I hope it has stretched your minds to see the breadth, height, depth and richness of the love of God for his whole creation. God desires to see the restoration of perfection in every part of his creation. This means the restoring of broken relationships – whether they be between people and God, between people and other people, between people and the planet, and even the restoration of broken, fallen individuals.

When we pray, ‘Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven’ we are committing to a massive mission. God’s massive mission to bring heaven and earth together. Every action which helps in this task should be supported and applauded. Any action which further separates, fragments and breaks up our world should be resisted. As I have tried to explain throughout this series of papers, supporting human rights can contribute to the building of God’s Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Human Rights is not itself the saviour of the world – there is only one Saviour and that is Jesus. However, Human Rights can be a means of bringing people together to find ways to build the common good.

I pray we will all have the courage, purpose and passion to do our part in making this world a better place for everyone.

This is possible if we live fully dependent on the power of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,

Amen.

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⁴ Ibid, 80.
⁵ Ibid, 86.