

The Thinking Salvationist

The Salvation Army today exists in 125 countries. Its 15, 765 Corps are made up of a total of 1,132,823 soldiers. That's 1, 132, 823 individual minds who have committed to the principles and practices of The Salvation Army as a movement, and who claim to follow the ways and teachings of Jesus in their everyday lives. Those 1,132,823 individual minds each hold the capacity to make their own decisions and form their own opinions on everything from their favorite meal to their governments. Each of those 1,132,823 individuals live separate lives, in differing environments with a variety of conversations, engagements, meetings and makeup of each day. 1,132,823 minds, created by God, with the capacity to think, engage and form ideas – that's not something to be sneezed at. However, for these minds to be a strong force in a world which so desperately needs new ideas, they must be active and willing to think. They must be 'thinking Salvationists'.

In his 2004 lecture at William Booth College, General Shaw Clifton asked 'What does it take to be a thinking Salvationist?'¹. In his exploration of this question, he paid tribute to the life of General Frederick Coutts, taking a look at what it was that made this man worthy of such a description. General Clifton points out that in order to be a Thinking Salvationist, one must have both a knowledge of his history as a Salvationist and a knowledge of the present day. He writes, "Unless we know where we have come from, we cannot know who we are today... a Thinking Salvationist has a knowledge of our past, a sense of our history, so that she or he can think intelligently and in context about the present and the future... a sense of history and a working knowledge of our past are crucial to being a modern thinking Salvationist". He emphasizes the importance of being simultaneously aware of the world today, writing "A sense of history is not enough on its own. A sense of the social, moral and political trends of the present day is also crucial to the Thinking Salvationist. Keeping in touch with, and understanding, the world beyond the often introspective confines of The Salvation Army is absolutely central to our soul-saving and soldier-making mission under God"².

Today, globalization and the internet have made the accessing of information and knowledge, and therefore the capacity for the world to form opinions in a split-second, much easier. On a daily basis we are bombarded with information, facts, propaganda and issues – watch the News for half an hour and you will likely feel overwhelmed. Too often, when a current issue comes up in conversation, we hear "Oh I don't know enough about that to be able to comment", or "I figure someone must know what they're talking about, so I'll just leave the decision-making up to the decision-makers". It is all too easy to be so caught up in the goings on of our daily lives that we simply 'don't have the time' to look outside our immediate view. As Salvationists, we must challenge this attitude of accepted ignorance. We must be aware of what is

¹ Clifton, S., 'Selected Writings Vol. 2, 2000-2010', 2010, Salvation Books, London, United Kingdom.

² *Ibid.*, p. 19.

happening in our world and be prepared to inject a Christian perspective into conversations. We must be 'teachable' thinking Salvationists³.

The beauty of today's fast-paced, information-accessible world is that that information is readily available to us also. Ten minutes a day spent reading the headlines and delving into those topics to which God draws your attention, will slowly dissolve the 'I don't know enough about that to comment' urge. When prayerfully considered, God will use our minds by developing thoughts, opinions and perspectives on issues which we previously knew nothing about. God created our minds with the intention of using them for good – for the furthering of His truth and his wisdom.

While this prospect is exciting, it must be noted that this may be uncomfortable at times and General Clifton's call for Thinking Salvationists comes with a warning. He writes "It sometimes takes enormous moral courage to be true to oneself. Let all aspiring to be a 'thinking Salvationist' note this. There may be a price to be paid. You may often be misunderstood"⁴. While God will use our minds for furthering His truth, human elements come into play and it is inevitable that, at times, Thinking Salvationists may disagree with each other. As Scott Higgins writes of all Christians, "Our primary calling is not to agree with one another but to love one another. Jesus didn't say that the world would know we are Christians by our unified opinions on controversial issues but by our love"⁵, the same can be said of Salvationists. We must approach our ideas and thoughts not with arrogance or a spirit of criticism, but with the mind that we are humans, attempting to undertake God's work and inject His wisdom into a sin-filled, chaotic world. Yet as our calling to be Salvationists came with the warning of self-sacrifice for living counter-culturally and speaking the words of God, we must be ready to experience such misunderstandings at times for the importance of speaking God's truth into a messy, chaotic world.

Romans 12:2 urges us: "Do not to be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind". We need Salvationists to consistently challenge the thinking of those around them through intelligent, scripturally-based conversation, and this cannot be done until Salvationist themselves are challenging their own thinking.

This series of papers, developed for the International Social Justice Commission, is designed to challenge Salvationist thinking on issues of war and terrorism, and the way in which we as Christians respond to it. These topics are merely examples of areas in which Salvationists can challenge their thinking, and are chosen primarily due to the writer's qualifications and interests. Each paper is designed to be controversial, to push boundaries and to encourage critical thinking with the aim of encouraging discussion. These topics are a starting point from which Salvationists everywhere can begin to

³ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Higgins, S., 'Making Room for Dissent: How we can disagree without destroying each other', scottjhiggins.com Blog, 18th September 2012, accessed 20th September 2012, <http://scottjhiggins.com/making-room-for-dissent-how-we-can-disagree-without-destroying-each-other/>

challenge thinking within their own area of interest. The papers are designed with the average Salvationist in mind in the hopes that Thinking Salvationists will rise up from every corner of the globe, acting as catalysts for innovation within The Salvation Army. As General Linda Bond's Vision for The Salvation Army – "One Army, One Mission, One Message"⁶ states, we are to go "into the world of the hurting, broken, lonely, dispossessed and lost, reaching them in love by all means... encourag[ing] innovation in mission"⁷. These papers are designed to do exactly that – to encourage the innovation of new methods of reaching the "hurting, broken, lonely, dispossessed and lost" to complement those methods which already exist. The aim of these papers is to do this through the encouragement of critical and innovative thinking in all areas – including those in which many Salvationists are already experts.

Each paper concludes with a "What can I do?" list in an attempt to make the results practical and hands-on. In addition to these papers and in line with its partial mandate to 'Raise strategic voices to advocate with the world's poor and oppressed' and 'Be a recognized center of research and critical thinking on issues of global social justice'⁸, the ISJC's resource, Jesus and Justice⁹, is a great place to begin to challenge one's own thinking and the thinking of those around them. It can be used as an individual study or as a group study and provides a starting point for the exploration of world issues. Additionally, the website of The Salvation Army's Ethics Centre in Canada¹⁰ provides a list of issues which can be explored and the New Zealand and Tonga Territory's Moral and Social Issues Council website¹¹ provides Discussion Documents for the same purpose.

While reading this, some 'Thinking Salvationists' whom you know may spring to mind. The Salvation Army is blessed with many intelligent, educated people who are contributing to academic debate across the world. However it is my belief that The Salvation Army is full of Salvationists who hold the knowledge and capacity to contribute to conversation on social justice issues in their own areas of life, yet are simply staying quiet. The circles in which you move and the things on which you think are your God-given area of expertise, and the knowledge and lessons you have gained through moving in this area are unique to you. We need Soldiers, Future Officers and Officers to recognize that whatever it is they are called to do, that ministry is inextricably linked with their calling to be a Salvationist. Whether you are called to be a Lawyer, a Receptionist, an Exercise Scientist, a Courier, a Salvation Army Officer or an

⁶ Bond, L., 'Vision', The Salvation Army International, accessed 4th March 2012, <http://www.salvationarmy.org/ihq/vision>

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ International Social Justice Commission, 'Purpose', The Salvation Army International Social Justice Commission, accessed 18th October 2011, http://www1.salvationarmy.org/IHQ/www_ihq_isjc.nsf/vw-dynamic-index/24062DEBBB9B2F138025755800580A76?openDocument

⁹ International Social Justice Commission, 'Jesus and Justice', The Salvation Army International Social Justice Commission, accessed 19th September 2011, http://www1.salvationarmy.org/IHQ/www_ihq_isjc.nsf/vw-dynamic-index/3CE12CB83836AA6D802578B9006F91B2?openDocument

¹⁰ The Salvation Army Canada Ethics Centre, <http://www.salvationarmyethics.org/>

¹¹ The Salvation Army New Zealand Moral and Social Issues Council, <http://www.salvationarmy.org.nz/our-community/church-life/masic/>

Information Technology specialist – God has a plan for you to use that calling in your ministry as a Salvationist. Soldiers of The Salvation Army are strategically placed by God in all areas of life to speak into all areas of life!

Let me share a little from my own experience. Upon completing a Bachelors Degree in Social Science (Criminology), I felt a strong calling to undertake further education. This had not been in my planning for my future, and I was largely unimpressed at the concept of more years on a student's (lack of) income and the thought of writing more essays. My plan was to work as a Criminologist for a few years in prison reform, and then enter the School for Officer Training to fulfill my calling to be an Officer. However, this new calling for further study was unmistakable, so I began to explore what it could be that God was asking me to study. Through a series of events, the answer became clear – I was to study a Double Masters program – a Masters in Policing, Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism and a Masters of International Security Studies. What? I wrestled with this concept and questioned how God could possibly use a Masters in Counter-Terrorism in ministry in The Salvation Army. However, acting on the wisdom of a number of people around me, I began to study and slowly but surely understood that God did, indeed, have a plan to use this degree. I began to pray about this overwhelming task. As issues of power, war and conflict were discussed in classes, I began to sense very clearly God's desire for His truth to be spoken in these discussions. I became aware of a common mentality among my classmates which I, as a relatively young, non-military-background, Christian female did not have. I realized that by challenging this mentality through my essays and class discussions, God was using me to be His mouthpiece and inject His perspective into an otherwise unchallenged conversation. I often found myself to have a completely different perspective within that context and this fact was regularly noticed by Lecturers and students. As I was learning copious amounts from my colleagues, they were being challenged by my own views on what they were teaching me. Having completed my degrees, God has given me a very clear vision as to how they are to be used in ministry both within and external to The Salvation Army.

We need strong Christian voices who are aware of not only their own contexts but of situations in the broader world, and are prepared to speak truth into these situations. Before we attempt to speak truth into the world, we must be one hundred per cent sure that the truth we are speaking is, in fact, God's truth. As General Clifton states, "Being a man of God transcends any thought or aim of being a 'thinking Salvationist'. We can hold all the views we like on Army history, Army personalities, Army policies, Army methods, Army theology, or the Army's future and still not be godly. The greatest need is our personal holiness".¹²

In our ever-changing and growing world, we as The Salvation Army must be prepared to form God-inspired, counter-cultural opinions. Let us be vigilant in keeping up with the movements of the world in an effort to stay ever-relevant, intuitive and entrepreneurial in the way in which we share God's love with the world. Let us be present where God has placed us and use the knowledge

¹² Clifton, *op. cit.*, p. 25

which He has given us to educate others about what we know, keeping in mind that, 'important as it is that we have in our ranks those who may be dubbed 'thinking Salvationists', it is infinitely more important that we have godly 'thinking Salvationists'¹³. As General Clifton stated of General Coutts, let it be said of us that we are a holy people who place our mind, brain and thinking capacities all at the disposal of our Lord. Let us be Thinking Salvationists.

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 27