

FOR REFLECTION

- * What powers has God given you?
- * How do you ensure you are being faithful in the use of your powers?
- * How can you help those around you better use the powers God has given them?

THE USE OF POWER

SERIES: TAKING A STAND

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.

Download the complete IPS at salvationarmy.org/isjc/ips

THE NEED for a Salvation Army statement on the use of power emerged from the International Theology and Ethics Symposium held in 2001. Work on an International Positional Statement (IPS) commenced soon after the establishment of IMASIC in 2008 and its release in January 2011 was a significant moment. Up to then, positional statements tended to address social issues impacting wider society, such as suicide prevention, abortion, human

trafficking. By taking a stand on the use of power, IMASIC was addressing issues much closer to home. The IPS on 'The Use of Power' is a statement with implications for every aspect of Salvation Army life.

All of us have experienced abuse of power at some time in our lives. Power is defined in the IPS as 'the possession of command, control, or influence over others'. The statement teaches that power is, in itself, not good or bad. The way power is used determines its character. Power can influence us – positively or negatively – in our homes, in our life as part of the Body of Christ and in the way we engage in the world around us.

Professor N.T. Wright, writer and bishop in the Church of England, identifies links between the abuse of power and the effect of evil, rebellion and sin:

Evil consists 'not in being created but in the rebellious idolatry by which humans worship and honour elements of the natural world rather than the God who made them ... they ignore the creator and try to worship something less demanding, something that will give them a short-term fix of power or pleasure'.¹

The IPS explains: '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.'

Every IPS includes biblical principles to ensure The Salvation Army takes a stand firmly grounded on Scripture. The 'Grounds for the Position' section includes, for example, these principles:

- 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).
- 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).

Every IPS includes a number of practical responses. To take a stand we need to be clear about what actions we will take. For example, one practical response states: '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.'



¹ N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection and the Mission of the Church*, 2011, p 95, SPCK Publishing, London



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» PERSONAL REFLECTION FROM LIEUT-COLONEL (DR) DEAN PALLANT

It took me a long time to appreciate how easy it is for me to use (and abuse) power. I am 6'8" tall, white, male, English-speaking, educated, extrovert. Although I have not always recognised it, God has gifted me many advantages and opportunities. My daily challenge is to ensure I use the powers at my disposal to build God's Kingdom and resist the temptation to abuse my powers for selfish, sinful purposes.

Salvation Army officer leaders are trusted with significant power, especially over appointments and the use of money. It is all too easy in the Army system for officers under an abuser leader to stay silent. This is one of the reasons I am a passionate supporter of the Accountability Movement. None of us is immune from the danger of abusing power (intentionally or unintentionally). We all need to have accountability mechanisms around us to make sure our powers are being used for Kingdom purposes.

I get increasingly uneasy when I hear leaders resist accountability. Resistance can be passive or aggressive. The way we use or abuse power is an indicator of

our Christian maturity. Dr Martin Luther King said: 'Power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anaemic.'² This thought echoes Ephesians 4:15, 'Speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.' When we cannot speak or hear the truth spoken in love there is a problem.

One of the ways I am trying to grow in Christian maturity is to encourage the development of married women officers. This battle is too often left to them to fight. That is not right. My wife, Eirwen, is a medical doctor who knows her own mind, but even she regularly feels undervalued as a married woman officer. I try to find opportunities to open up space for Eirwen – and other women officers – to better use their God-given gifts and abilities. We cannot say we love people and still tolerate the abuse of power. Unless we take a stand, we are, in the words of Martin Luther King, 'sentimental and anaemic'.



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PERSONAL REFLECTION FROM CATHERINE TSIKIRAYI

The use of power is an issue people are struggling with both in politics and in the Church. For most Africans, the mention of 'power' brings back memories of colonialism and its attendant evils and, subsequently, the psychological imprisonment perpetrated by the governments they had applauded as their liberators from colonial shackles. Today, abuse of power happens not just in governments but in churches as well. The church is a place where one expects to find refuge and solace, not corruption and exploitation.

Personally, reflecting on the use of power brings to mind situations that I have encountered throughout my adult life, from both a political and church perspective. Use and abuse of power manifests itself in different ways, sometimes openly and, in other cases, subtly.

As an older-generation Salvationist, I have sadly observed how Salvation Army culture in my country has transformed from being a serving Christian church, based on the Kingdom values espoused by the Founder, to a culture of materialism, giving rise to exploitation and corruption. This new culture has been borrowed from the Pentecostal churches which

² In his speech 'Where Do We Go from Here?', at the 11th convention of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in Atlanta, 16 August 1967



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preach a gospel of prosperity, with some of its pastors living a life of luxury. This has led to exploitative demands on the congregants, a lack of accountability, abuse of church resources for personal gain and disregard for constructive advice from senior local officers and members of the church. There is no longer any distinction between political leaders and some church leaders who should be 'shepherds' of God's people. The African culture of generosity, respect for authority and for each other, and compassion and integrity, is invoked as a way of exploiting church members. Cases of embezzlement, promiscuity and consultation with witch doctors or clairvoyants are rampant in the church, but no measures are taken to put things right. Some appointments, at different levels, are no longer based on spiritual maturity and the capability of the individuals, but on their perceived material value, on personal relationships and totems (Ezekiel 45:9-10; Micah 3:1-3; 1 Timothy 6:9). Abuse of power is a sin. However, we have all fallen short of the grace of God (Romans 3:23), but we need to admit our transgressions and return to Kingdom values, according to our covenant with God (1 John 1:9).

PERSONAL REFLECTION FROM MAJOR LEE KONG YEE

Asian Christianity is indebted to Western mission for reaching Asia for Christ. The expansion of Christianity during the colonial period was done hand in hand with Western colonial conquest. We are long past that period, yet we still have remnants of colonialism lingering in Asia. One such example is the abuse of power by a colonial style of leadership, which perpetuates manipulation and exploitation.

Throughout my 35 years as an officer, I have maintained this is one of the greatest hindrances to mission in Asia. Many locals view the Army as Western and its approach to mission is linked with foreign and, sometimes, abusive powers. A colonial style of leadership is culturally insensitive and preoccupied with the mere continuity of Western power. Something is deeply wrong when officers experience abusive leaders with significant power over their appointments and the disbursement of finances. It is an example of white privilege: first, given a head start to rule, and then the freedom from certain consequences of individual actions.

The nature of the Army's structure is hierarchical and top-down. If left unchecked, this can lead to extremism and intolerance – a dangerous trend. On occasion, such

extremism has resulted in the blatant abuse of power unbecoming of a Christian leader. There are a number of disturbing, sad stories of adult children, retelling their officer-parents' abuse. Some have become bitter and left the Army. Yet, there are others who suffer in silence without an avenue to address their situation. A white leader once remarked privately that an officer's calling and availability should never be taken for granted and be abused.

I feel extremely upset and angry when I see such abuse within our ranks. Will anyone take a stand? Who will hold our leaders accountable? We need inspired leaders who are not afraid and will firmly and decisively take a stand on the misuse of power, going against the tide and nip this dangerous trend in the bud. One way we can tone down the abuse of power is to have more local representation in leadership and hold each other accountable for the use of power and actions.

Thank God, not all leaders are abusive. We have had good, inspired leaders who have learned to redefine the concept of mission to reflect this post-colonial shift in Asia. The healthy use of power offers a sharpened sensitivity to local situations and people. May God grant us the courage to take a stand and feel the heartbeat of those whom we lead.