



DISCUSSION PAPER FOR SALVATIONISTS:  
**Religious Freedom**

Developed by the:  
**Australia Moral and Social Issues Council**



The intention of discussion papers for Salvationists is to present issues of importance in a way that stimulates thought and discussion. Many of the issues addressed are controversial and give rise to opposing points of view. Although people often think of issues as right or wrong, black or white, it is helpful to consider these issues from different perspectives. These papers are not definitive in themselves but designed to help facilitate prayerful exploration by Salvationists and friends.

This Discussion Paper follows the process of the Faith-Based Facilitation Model of discussion. This is a way of helping people think, talk, explore and respond to issues in the light of their faith. This process causes us to slow down and be deliberate in our thinking, rather than rushing to conclusions or judgements. It takes us through a process of identifying the issue, describing and analysing it, reflecting on it and evaluating our thoughts, and then deciding how our exploration will impact the way we live.

When we think things through with other people, and do so with vulnerability, space is created for God to speak clearly to us through them. We encourage you to listen for God's prompting while discussing or thinking through this topic as you use your God-given intellect to seek God's Kingdom here on earth.

## The Issue

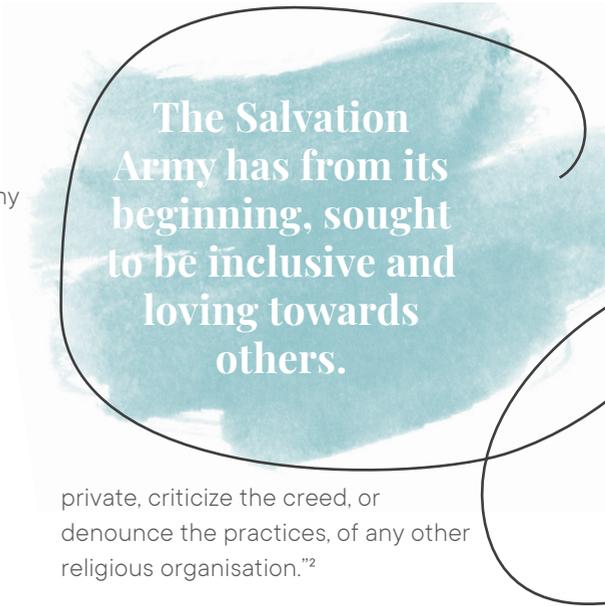
Religious Freedom, a feature of modern democracy, is the principle that people should be able to practice their religion free from government interference. Democracy also holds that one group should not be able to impose their views or their practices on the majority. For the Salvationist and Christian we ask "How might we express our own religious freedom in a way that does not diminish the rights and freedoms of others?"

# Describe and Analyse

## Statement of Position

The Salvation Army does not have a specific statement of position on Religious Freedom. However, the following principles from Salvation Army history and practice are helpful.

The Salvation Army has from its beginning, sought to be inclusive and loving towards others. Catherine Booth wrote "It is not your business to go and find fault with other people... Never try to find a hole in their coat, or pull them to pieces. Mind your own business, which is seeking and saving the lost."<sup>1</sup> The Orders and Regulations for Field Officers (1921) has separate paragraphs dealing with how to treat other denominations, Muslims, Jews and agnostics/non-believers. Several core principles are articulated: "The Field Officer (F.O.) must never belittle any minister or other person who does not approve of The Salvation Army principles or believe The Army methods. The F.O. must not, either in public or



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private, criticize the creed, or denounce the practices, of any other religious organisation."<sup>2</sup>

The Salvation Army has an unequivocal commitment to the intrinsic worth of all persons, and this requires that "we ought not to approach members of other world faiths with a crusading or proselytising spirit; we long for all persons to acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord, but there is a place for wisdom and respect while still entertaining that hope."<sup>3</sup>

1. Booth, C. "The Salvation Army and its Relation to the Churches" in Booth, C. The Salvation Army in Relation to Church and State. (London, UK: The Salvation Army Publishing Dept, 1883), 28

2. The Salvation Army, Orders and Regulations for Field Officers (London, UK: SP&S, 1921) 241, 242.

3. Clifton, S. "A Passionate look toward the Future." In Selected Writings Vol 2. (London, UK: Salvation Books, 2010), 59

## Biblical and Theological Perspectives

The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10) explores Jesus' call on his followers to re-evaluate what constitutes their 'neighbour'. The parable begins with the query from an expert in the law asking, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus responds with one sentence: "What is written in the law?" The expert, being a Jew, answers quickly, "Love the Lord your God and... love your neighbour." For the expert in the law, following this commandment was enough for him to inherit eternal life, but nevertheless, he asks for clarification: "Who is my neighbour?". Jesus responds with the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

In this Parable, Jesus gives an extreme example of loving and respecting others irrespective of their religion and beliefs. For the expert in the law, loving your neighbour meant loving your fellow Jew, but Jesus, through the parable, challenges this thinking and sends a message that our neighbour could be anyone, including a Jew, Hindu, Muslim or any person who has a different opinion or religious background to your own.

Christ enables Salvationists to practice the love of Jesus in daily life. By doing that, we can all practically improve our relationships with other Christians and non-Christians, which can take steps towards religious freedom, and also produces harmony and social peace in society.

- *How might you apply the parable of the Good Samaritan to the subject of religious freedom? Who might be our neighbour in the context of religious freedom?*
- *How do we apply this parable when the person asking for religious freedom has beliefs which are different to ours? For example, when our Muslim neighbour wants to exercise Sharia Law<sup>4</sup>; or when other Christians hold views or beliefs that differ from our own (e.g. differing views on vaccination, creationism etc)?*

### **Reflect on what the following Scripture passages may add to our understanding of religious freedom:**

- *Daniel 3 – when might it be right to reject other religious practices? The first six chapters of Daniel tell stories of maintaining religious freedom in a hostile environment alongside the ready adoption of local customs, dress and even names.*
- *1 Peter 2:13-14 – what might it mean to submit to authorities if they reject our faith practices?*
- *Acts 4 (especially verses 18-20)*

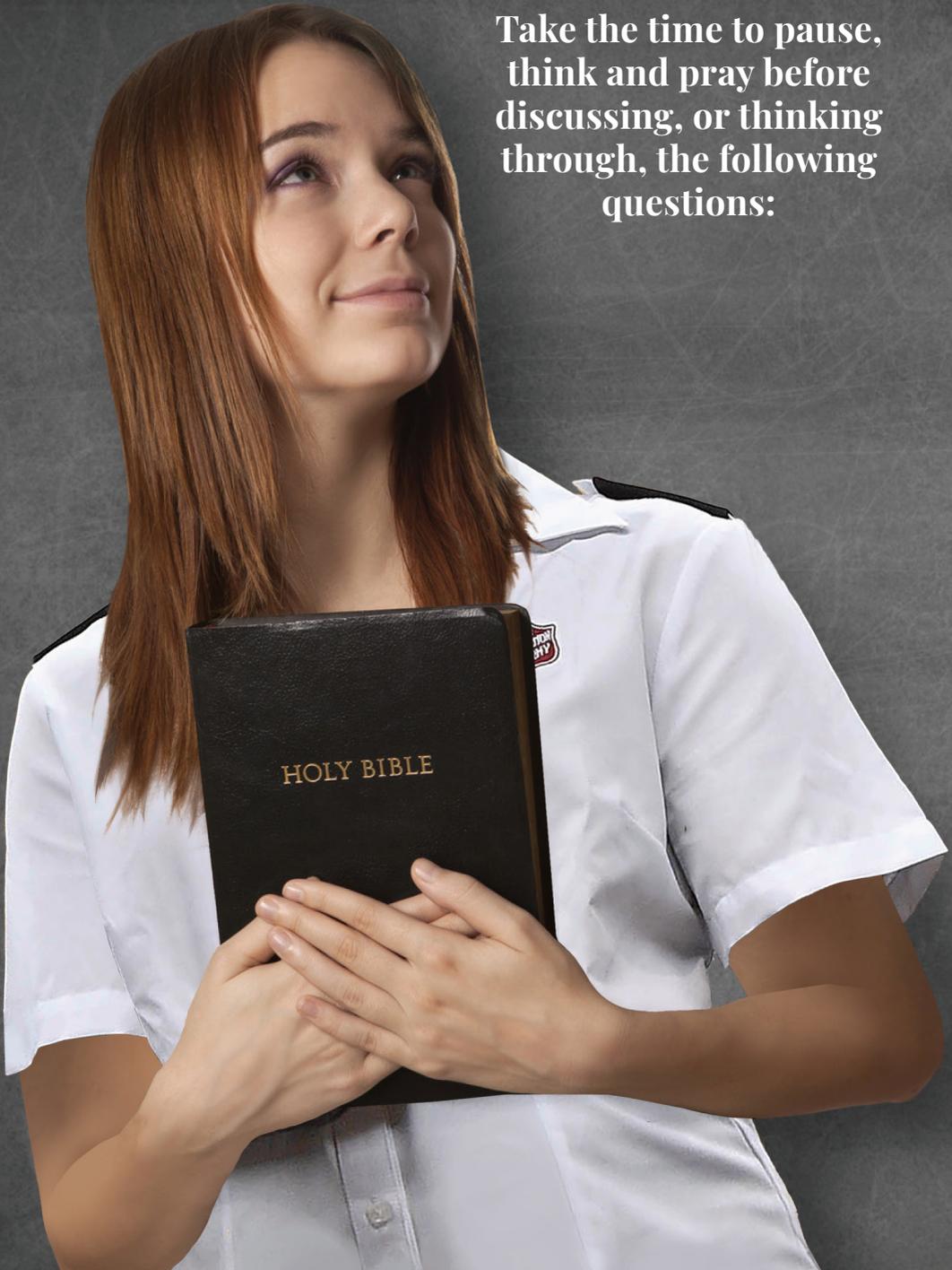
### **What other Scripture or Christian traditions do you think are relevant to a discussion on Religious Freedom?**

4. "Sharia is the fundamental religious concept of Islam—namely, its law. The religious law of Islam is seen as the expression of God's command for Muslims and, in application, constitutes a system of duties that are incumbent upon all Muslims by virtue of their religious belief." (Reference: Encyclopaedia Britannica <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Shariah>)



## Reflect and Evaluate

Take the time to pause, think and pray before discussing, or thinking through, the following questions:



- Taking into consideration what has been discussed so far, how would you define religious freedom?

- What changes in society have you noticed? Do you feel that “Christianity” or “religion” is as respected today as in the past or have there been changes? What do you think might be the positives and the negatives of these changes?

- What might it mean for someone who has experienced privilege because of their religion in the past to now have that privilege challenged?

- What religious freedoms do you think should be protected, what might you think should be respected but not necessarily protected, and what might be best to let go? How have you come to that conclusion?

- Is it imperative that we be allowed to proselytize as a freedom of religion, and should there be protections for vulnerable people from proselytising?

- What Scriptural imperatives would you want religious freedom to uphold or would you be prepared to “break the law” to uphold?

- Religious freedom may be seen as limited where religious practice clearly contravenes the law (for example practices such as capital punishment or female genital mutilation). Less clear are

areas where religious freedom may be expressed in the form of discrimination where a religious organisation may wish to hire employees on the basis of faith or religion, or where a religious person is prohibited from expressing their religious practice or beliefs in the workplace. What are some examples where it is not so clear or there is disagreement?

- Can you think of roles where removing any barriers to inclusion is important, and roles where a more exclusive approach might be best?

- There is a tension between The Salvation Army’s evangelical desire to “win the world for Jesus”, and our respect for those who practice other religions. How does this affect our attitude towards the religious freedom of those who hold different beliefs to us?

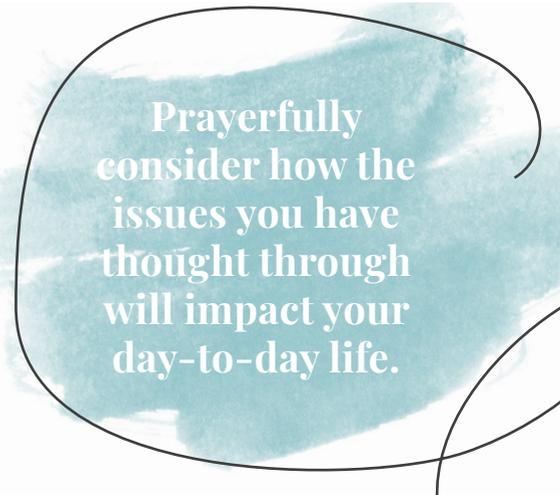
- Throughout history, where there has been a lack of religious freedom, or where there has been tolerance of only government approved religion or beliefs, minority groups have experienced oppression and persecution. Sadly, this has sometimes resulted in pogroms and active discrimination. Sometimes this has been deliberate, and other times the lack of freedoms has resulted in accidental discrimination. What are some examples of accidental discrimination? What are some unintentional impacts of defining freedoms for specific groups?

# Decide and plan – how then shall we live?

**Religious freedom is necessary, but it is detrimental for society when it impinges upon someone else's freedom by discriminating against them based on their belief system. Religious freedom is not a simple topic – it presents many questions that do not have straightforward answers. The following questions can assist us to work through these complexities for ourselves:**

- Consider the voices of those directly impacted by the issue. Have we fully listened to their experience and perspective?
- Have your attitudes or perspectives regarding this issue changed over time? What contributed to the change?

- Examine our own blind spots: Are there alternative scriptural views? Have we been disproportionately influenced by our own friends, family or background?
- How do you manage conflict with others regarding religious freedom?
- Are there people or situations in which you find it easier to “agree to disagree” on issues of religious freedom and why?
- Who in your day-to-day life has different cultural or religious backgrounds? How has this discussion on religious freedom impacted how you might interact with them?
- What are some areas within the topic of religious freedom that you may like to explore at more depth?
- What are some practical actions Salvationists can take regarding religious freedom?



**Prayerfully consider how the issues you have thought through will impact your day-to-day life.**



**The Bible (first and foremost)** – *The Bible is God’s word to the human race. This does not mean, though, that it contains specific solutions to all ethical dilemmas and the contexts in which they arise;*

**Tradition** – *Tradition expresses the collective wisdom of the Church gathered over time to further guide decision-making;*

**Reason** – *Reason is one of God’s gifts to us for determining how we might act. For instance, “justice” is a heavily used general moral precept in the Bible, but we often need to reason from the principle to a practical course of action;*

**Experience** – *Experience covers a broad space. It can be seen as a reference to Christian conscience as being the way in which God makes us aware of what is right, but our conscience can sometimes be misled, coloured by cultural prejudices and limited by a narrow range of experiences. Experience also refers to factual knowledge. Modern science, including medicine, sociology, psychology, and biology, uses observation to objectively understand the situations we face; the facts discovered can be very important to good ethical decision-making.*

# Additional Resources

**The following Salvation Army International Positional Statements are relevant and helpful on this topic:**

The Salvation Army and the State,  
<https://www.salvationarmy.org/ihq/ipsstate>

The Use of Power [https://s3.amazonaws.com/cache.salvationarmy.org/af8f42bf-dcf4-43e2-8696-bb8d0d8455aa\\_English+The+Use+of+Power+IPS.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/cache.salvationarmy.org/af8f42bf-dcf4-43e2-8696-bb8d0d8455aa_English+The+Use+of+Power+IPS.pdf)

Racism [https://s3.amazonaws.com/cache.salvationarmy.org/7d3c015c-1af5-4211-830f-b7b0c6a65898\\_English+Racism+IPS.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/cache.salvationarmy.org/7d3c015c-1af5-4211-830f-b7b0c6a65898_English+Racism+IPS.pdf)



*Discussion Paper for Salvationists: Religious Freedom*  
Produced by The Salvation Army Australia Moral and Social Issues Council 2021  
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