



ARTICLES OF WAR TILL I DIE

by Captain Stephen Court



‘AND I do here and now call upon all present to witness that I have entered into this undertaking and sign these articles of war of my own free will, feeling that the love of Christ, who died 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 till I die’ (declaration from the old articles of war, to which most officers and soldiers have covenanted). Is such a declaration reasonable in the 21st century? Some think it unreasonable to expect people to commit their whole lives to anything, even the Army.

Unreasonable? Every day nearly 30,000 children die because of preventable diseases and starvation. There are currently possibly another 4.5 billion people going to hell less quickly (than the dying children). In light of this reality, should we consider it reasonable to ask for only a partial commitment from our soldiers? Maybe Thursday night and Sunday morning? Maybe for a decade or so or until a corps officer they don’t like arrives – whichever comes first? Maybe until they feel that soldiership is hindering promotion opportunities? Maybe until their friendships make their covenant inconvenient? Maybe until their desires make it so? Maybe until we’re tired of the pace?

In light of the need and the potential, it is unreasonable to ask for anything less. Isn’t there a danger of ‘over-challenging’ people in our era? ‘Experts’ seem to barter this lie. And some leaders have been hoodwinked by it. Their weakness seems to be a desire for relevance. Jesus ‘over-challenges’ his crowd as much as anybody anywhere: ‘If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross daily, and follow me’ (Luke 9:23 *New Living Translation*). Jesus was right 2,000 years ago and is still right today. You can’t ‘over-challenge’ people in this era. This is the generation of extreme sports. Why extreme? People are looking for risk and thrill. Will watered down ‘membership’ options offer that? Never in a million years!

This is a generation of suicide bombers. Why are people blowing themselves up? People want to throw their lives away on something they believe will make a difference. Will moderation and committee-speak political correctness offer that? Never in a million years! This is a generation of new and exotic party drugs. Why? People are craving danger and

sensation. Will mediocrity and half measures offer that? Never in a million years! Either you provide people with a godly, supernatural, holy risk and thrill, an option to throw their lives away on something that will make a godly difference, promising danger and sensation within the Kingdom of God, or they will do it outside God’s Kingdom.

Why else do you think we can’t ‘over-challenge’ them? Primitive Salvationist history is one of the great romance stories of our world. God wrapped a small group of misfits in Holy Spirit-conviction, infused them with love, dressed them in prophetic garb, fitted them with a holy disdain for dignified reputation, trained them in the sacrificial Cross-life, deployed them among poor people and transformed great swathes of the world. History is splattered with examples of Salvationists living it out. But you don’t have to dust off 19th-century books to find them. Around the world today you can find people living romantic, heroic lives as salvation soldiers, sacrificing ridiculously, warring valiantly and loving prodigiously.

Isn’t the military ethos obsolete? Again, the ‘experts’ assert that. And sometimes leaders get confused. But the grassroots suggest something else. The driving vision for the global 24/7 prayer movement, the best ecumenical example of Salvation Army grassroots activism in this young century, is of an Army of holiness. It is militant, aggressive, surrendered, uncompromised stuff – heroic, romantic. It reads like an early *War Cry* article. How can you look at something like that and ask for a partial commitment? The worst we can do now is water things down. Watering down only produces watered-down soldiers. We need to beef it up. Beefing it up produces beefed-up soldiers. So it isn’t unreasonable to expect people to commit their whole lives to this cause. It is unreasonable *not* to call them to this commitment.

Although the current articles of war omit the phrase ‘until I die’, the same commitment is still there in *Orders and Regulations For Soldiers of The Salvation Army* – now called *Chosen To Be A Soldier*. Chapter XI, section 5, paragraph 3 declares: ‘No one must become a soldier as an experiment or with mental reservations as to the length of his “service for the salvation for the whole world”. Only those who are fully determined, by God’s help, to be true soldiers of The Salvation Army for life can rightly take the holy vows involved in the swearing-in ceremony.’

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