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11 February 2011

General Shaw Clifton
International Headquarters

Ref: Family Law

Dear General,

Thank you for your gracious response to my letter of 30 November last.

Please forgive the delay in responding; I am sadly compelled to write against a backdrop of having not seen xxxxxxxxxxxx, my two-year-old son, for the last ten weeks, with no expectation of when I will ever see him again – this against the orders of the court.

The matter now rests with our Territorial Commander; although I am heartbroken to say so, my hope of the Army being willing or able to render any meaningful assistance to xxxxxxxxxxxx and I is all but extinguished. In many respects, given his mother's intransigence, it is now quite possibly too late.

Nevertheless, as I said in my earlier letter that it is not my wish to encumber you with the detail of my case so much as to plead that the worldwide Salvation Army looks hard at this particular moral and social issue, for arguably the most distressing matter pertaining to my case is that it is so very common.

I believe that the Army should be looking at how we approach family breakdown, within the ambit of moral and social issues, and beyond that, from a social justice perspective, having a strong voice as God's people in the debate about the sadness of broken families and in particular the societal damage caused by the disenfranchisement of fathers.

It is acknowledged by almost all concerned in my case that here the Army has a substantial policy vacuum; my testimony is that much of the difficulty I have experienced in soliciting the interest and involvement of senior officers is down to the absence of positional statements or other defined policy which they (or corps officers in the first instance) may take guidance from, especially in the absence of personal practical experience. This is, I believe, positive in so far as empirical evidence would suggest the incidence of such destructive family breakdown in Salvationist families to be much lower than societal norms.

I have attempted to distill the issues, which perhaps you would be kind enough to comment upon:

1. **The responsibility the Army perceives itself to bear towards defending the human rights of child on the cradle roll is not, to my knowledge, formally articulated**, unless it falls within the ambit of ‘safe and sound’ – which does not address psychological or sociological harm to a child and his family.
2. **The responsibility the Army perceives itself to bear towards a Soldier who is the victim of abuse within the family, irrespective of age or gender, is unclear.** Whilst it would be ‘taken as read’ that a woman hitherto unknown to us, allegedly fleeing a violent husband would come to the Army and be offered support and indeed specific practical assistance, a male soldier suffering at his wife’s hand caught people unprepared and I went, for the most part, unsupported. I believe that societal attitudes towards men are a major part of this problem. The Army led the way in respecting, empowering and enfranchising women in leadership, something which I know you have advanced as General, but might the Army show the same concern for *men* where society and aggressive feminism marginalizes them, particularly as fathers?
3. **Expectations as to the conduct of two Salvationists who divorce, under any circumstances, are not clearly defined. What does the Army hold to be the rights of the children, and the responsibilities of the parents towards their children – and towards one another?** Some other faiths and denominations have clear, child-centric policy in this regard. *Most*, including the Army, do not!
4. **The Army at present does not, as a matter of policy or practice, seek to involve itself in mediation to avoid litigation where a divorce is a necessary outcome**, despite it being the inference of O&R that this should be so for *any* dispute. Although a divorce decree must be issued by a court, the entire gamut of ancillary relief and resolution of matters involving children of the marriage *can* be addressed and resolved, or in the worst case, the specific areas of disagreement defined. I pleaded for assistance with this early on, and it was not forthcoming. The secular courts, predictably, wreaked havoc subsequently, and I have been censured, in writing, by my son’s Divisional Commander for not choosing to continue litigating.
5. I have repeatedly been told that the Army will only support my son to the extent of affirming the orders of the courts. Irrespective of the reason for our not seeing one another, the court will quite probably order ‘no contact’ as being in xxxxxxxxxxxx’s best interests after the passage of more time, given the prolonged separation. I take this to mean that at that juncture the Army would no longer espouse xxxxxxxxxxxx’s, or my right, to family life together. **Is it the really the Army’s belief that our stand on such moral issues as a child’s right to a relationship with their parents should be subjugated by secular legal practice?** This is not in evidence in other aspects of our approach to ethics.

My experience tells me that there is a bigger picture issue.

- **In this country, the first review of family law for over twenty years is taking place, covering both public (care, fostering and adoption) and private (separation-driven) matters. Despite enquiries, I cannot find any evidence of the Army's interaction with this review.** This is the same Salvation Army that ploughs resources into family tracing - often, though sadly by no means universally – the endgame of lives touched by family breakdown of some form, and into services for the homeless, the users of which cite family breakdown as the most common cause of their plight and often also its result in the second generation. Surely prevention is better than cure?
- The Army worldwide acts as a 'rescue-shop within a yard of hell' for so many, yet **I cannot find evidence of a single Army initiative looking after and affirming the needs and rights of the many thousands of parents who have lost their children to the family courts**, to ills such as forced adoption and parental alienation. Such men as I form a great proportion of the majority demographic group who commit suicide or end up in the care of the Army's other social services, such as hostels and counseling.
- **Children such as my little lad grow up, (in his case within the Army!) without any formal, *practical* affirmation from the church that they should have a loving relationship with (most commonly) their father** and extended paternal family, and with no recognition as sin of the actions of those who have willfully denied them that most basic of relationships.

The plight of children whose lives are touched by the courts is being forgotten, if indeed it is recognized for what it is. Meanwhile, solicitors and judiciary alike (throughout the western world) derive a sordid living profiting from their misery, which whilst 'white collar' is a living no more palatable than those who traffic women and children. No mainstream Christian denomination has anything much to say.

Finally, a personal perspective as I seek to take positive steps forward:

I am saddened by the observations of others, combined with my own, that the events of the last two years of my life and my compulsion, under God, to speak out for fathers and children like my son and I, are likely to preclude my fulfilling my long-standing calling to officership. To be blunt, the Army has created much of the pain of late, not least by standing by and holding the coats whilst I have been exposed to inhuman treatment, or criticizing my response to situations I ought never to have been placed in. I cannot help but feel that the controversy surrounding my case and my unwillingness to simply walk away from my little boy will impede my opportunity to discharge my calling. Everyone touched by this process is stigmatized in some way and I have even had to contemplate whether I can continue to serve God in The Salvation Army as my forbears have as soldiers and officers for the last century.

I refuse to believe, though, that the experiences to which I have been exposed are for naught. As surely as I believe that, whilst I may be absent, God continues to care and plan for my little boy, I believe there is purpose in my painful experiences; as surely as you identified with me as a fellow father, General, I am able to identify with those thousands of men. I have lived their pain. I understand it as they do. In my interaction with other fathers, they tell me so.

In this regard, whilst very clearly I am seeking further elucidation as to the Army's position, to help my son (and to show him I did my best, if my efforts come to naught) and others like him, perhaps far more importantly I kindly seek your assistance in proposing means by which I may begin to positively influence the Army and render meaningful service drawing upon my experiences.

I would be keen, for example, to by some means address the ISJC with a more cerebral paper or similar on the subject, and/or to contribute to a MSIC study when they next convene.

At a practical level, I am already exploring the opportunity to host some form of outreach xxxxxxxxxxxxxx aimed at fathers like me. These issues permeate many areas of the Army's ecclesiological and social being, and I aspire to commit my talents and experience to make a difference.

I work in Central London and would be delighted if you could spare me the time for even the briefest of meetings on this subject; I am at your disposal in this regard.

With sincerest good wishes, in Christ,

[Daddy]
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