

# **CHAPTER XI: SOCIAL PRINCIPLES OF THE CHURCH**

## **Introduction**

From the beginnings of the Wesleyan movement in London, Wesleyans became known for their strong opposition to the kidnapping and trading of people from places such as Africa and the Caribbean for enslavement, and to the many forms of suffering inflicted upon them. This demonstrates the longstanding Wesleyan concern for justice in social life.

These Social Principles are prayerfully considered reflections grounded in Scripture and in the doctrines of the Church. They seek to express the voice of the Church, from the standpoint of its faith, in relation to difficulties arising within human society. It is hoped that these principles will provide guidance and give expression to the prophetic spirit of the Church. They are an invitation to all members of the Church to share in prayerful reflection upon the relationship between our work and our faith.

We continue to affirm our faith in God our Father, in Jesus Christ our Saviour, and in the Holy Spirit as our Guide and Protector.

Because of the great and impartial love of God in which we share, we give thanks to Him and affirm without reservation the worth of every individual person. We therefore renew our commitment to be courageous witnesses to the Gospel among all peoples of the world, allowing that Gospel to reach deeply into the way we live and fulfil our responsibilities.

## **Principle I: The Created World**

All creation belongs to God, and we are accountable for the way in which we use it or misuse it. All created things should therefore be cared for, protected and valued because they are God's creation, not merely because of their usefulness to humanity. This includes water, air, land, sources of energy, plants, animals and the atmosphere. The Church has a responsibility to encourage ways of living and social change that promote health and preserve the natural beauty with which the earth was created.

## **Principle II: Marriage**

We affirm the sacredness of the covenant of marriage, expressed by a man and a woman in mutual commitment, love, support, self-giving and genuine respect. Within such a marriage, we believe God blesses the married couple whether or not they have children.

## **Principle III: Divorce**

Because of the sacredness of the marriage covenant, we believe divorce should not be entered into lightly and should ordinarily arise only where wise efforts at counselling and reconciliation have failed and no realistic possibility of restoration remains. At the same time, we recognise the right of a divorced person to remarry. We express particular concern for the care and wellbeing of children whose parents are divorced or remarried and support their continuing care by either or both parents. We also strongly encourage the Church and society to provide particular pastoral care to people from families affected by divorce.

#### **Principle IV: Sexual Relations between Men and Women**

We regard sexual intimacy between a man and a woman as a good gift of God intended to deepen the loving relationship of a married couple. We encourage every person to exercise self-control until the proper context for this gift is reached in marriage.

Although sexual desire is part of human experience whether a person is married or unmarried, we affirm that sexual intercourse between a man and a woman is to occur within lawful marriage. The Church therefore does not accept sexual relations outside marriage.

The Church does not accept the commercial use of the human body in ways that diminish the dignity of women or men. Children, young people and adults should therefore be educated concerning this gift of God and appropriate sexual conduct.

The 2005 text also states the Church's opposition to sexual relations between persons of the same sex, describing them as contrary to its understanding of Christian and biblical teaching. It further associates such conduct with serious disease, including AIDS. These statements are translated here as they appear in the source text.

#### **Principle V: Abortion**

The beginning and ending of human life are matters belonging to God. Our belief in the sacredness of life in the womb therefore leads the Church to oppose abortion. At the same time, the sacredness and wellbeing of the mother must also be respected where pregnancy creates serious suffering or danger to her. Consideration of abortion in such circumstances should therefore be prayerful, careful and informed by all those appropriately involved, including medical practitioners, carers and counsellors.

#### **Principle VI: The God-given Rights of Children**

Children are gifts from God entrusted to their parents and have a right to be cared for, protected, nurtured and loved by them. They are full human persons with God-given rights, and adults and society also have responsibilities towards them. We therefore support Church schools and all sound forms of educational development that enable children to grow towards mature adulthood. Every child has a right to good education consistent with the Christian faith, as well as adequate food, shelter, clothing and other forms of support necessary for health and development in every dimension of life. Children should be protected from economic exploitation and every form of abuse and wrongdoing.

#### **Principle VII: The God-given Rights of Young People**

Young people constitute a large proportion of our population, yet their opportunities are often limited and full participation in society can be difficult. We therefore support practices that encourage young people to participate in decision-making and oppose their unjust marginalisation. Opportunities for employment and appropriate training should be actively developed for them.

#### **Principle VIII: The God-given Rights of Women**

We believe women and men are equal in every dimension of their humanity. We affirm the right of women to have equal opportunities with men in employment,

responsibilities, positions and benefits. We also affirm the importance of women being represented in positions and offices where decisions are made throughout the life and work of the Church.

### **Principle IX: The God-given Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

We affirm the full personhood of every individual and each person's belonging within the family of God. It is the proper responsibility of the Church and society to serve all people, including those who live with physical or intellectual disabilities. We call upon the Church and society to recognise the gifts of persons with disabilities and enable them to participate fully in the life of Church and society. Appropriate programmes should be established to support, employ, educate, accommodate and provide transport for them.

### **Principle X: Population Growth**

Because of the effects that may arise from rapid population growth, responsible attention should be given to population pressures. People should consider the wider circumstances of population growth when making decisions concerning the number of children in their families. It is therefore important that people have access to appropriate information and means by which to make responsible family-planning decisions.

### **Principle XI: Intoxicating Liquor and Other Harmful Drugs**

We reaffirm the traditional position of encouraging all members of the Church to abstain from intoxicating liquor as a witness to God's renewing and calling love. We likewise warn against possessing and using harmful illicit drugs. We support educational programmes that teach people to avoid intoxicating liquor, tobacco and harmful drugs because of their dangers to health and life.

We support strong laws regulating the importation, sale and distribution of harmful drugs, together with laws protecting society from conduct arising from drug use that endangers others. Assistance and rehabilitation should also be provided to those whose lives have been harmed by drug dependence.

### **Principle XII: Gambling**

Gambling includes activities such as gambling for money, bingo, dice, lotteries, casinos, horse racing, betting and similar practices in which a person gives a small amount of money or property in the hope of gaining a larger amount. The Church regards these practices as creating serious social harm and as endangering spiritual, moral, social and economic wellbeing. Christians should therefore avoid gambling, and the Church should provide assistance to those whose lives have been harmed by it.

### **Principle XIII: Political Life**

We believe Government should take seriously its responsibility to protect the freedom of all people in the country in accordance with the Constitution of the Kingdom. The Church has a responsibility to remind its people to observe and obey the laws established by Government for the good order of society. The Church also has a

responsibility to call the Government's attention to laws or regulations which the Church believes conflict with the Gospel.

#### **Principle XIV: International Relations**

We believe that the world created by God is one world. Nevertheless, ideas and systems sometimes arise that conflict with the Church's fundamental understanding of the Gospel. The Church must therefore remain ready to seek the meaning of the Gospel in considering how it should respond to proposals and ideas concerning our world.

##### **(a) Nations and Cultures**

We believe God's care and love extend equally to every person regardless of differences of nationality, ethnicity or culture. Every culture has shortcomings, while at the same time every nation has a responsibility to care for its people. The Church recognises that national structures and cultural practices can at times result in injustice. Despite differences of political belief and culture, the Church supports the pursuit of justice and peace in every nation.

##### **(e) War and Peace**

We believe war conflicts with the teachings of Christ. We therefore do not accept war as the proper means of resolving international or domestic disputes. Every nation should seek to resolve conflict through peaceful negotiation. The value of human life must take precedence over military demands. We should work towards ending compulsory military service and the manufacture and distribution of weapons of war, particularly nuclear weapons.

##### **(f) Law and Justice**

Every person should be able to feel safe within society and to enjoy the rights of life in that society through the maintenance and protection of law. We do not support conduct that encourages wrongdoing or crime. We support the work of the United Nations and of the Government of Tonga insofar as they pursue justice and peace.