

A WESLEYAN SOCIAL WITNESS: **HOLINESS AND THE PUBLIC SQUARE**

Introduction

In the summer of 2022, the John Wesley Institute gathered twelve thought leaders in Washington, DC to craft a document on Wesleyan social witness. This group included: Estrela Alexander, James Antle, Dale Coulter, Ryan N. Danker, Beth Felker Jones, Grant Miller, Joy J. Moore, Stephen Rankin, Chappell Temple, and David Watson; academics, pastors, and journalists from the broad Wesleyan tradition. Over the course of two days, this group wrote an initial draft of the document below that was subsequently edited to focus the work and give it a unified voice. The edited document was then sent to Christian ethicists and political theologians from the broader Christian tradition for response, which proved very helpful in pointing out areas where additional comment was necessary. The response was particularly positive; especially as the Wesleyan tradition has not systematically engaged social witness as a discipline, despite a long and respected tradition of social engagement. The document before you is a first step in applying Wesleyan theology to an authentically Wesleyan social witness. It is our hope that our work will continue to equip the church to faithfully engage the world with the message of full salvation.

Prologue

1. What does a properly ordered society look like? What is the role of government? How do we know what is just and unjust? How do we know right from wrong? And how are these ideas applicable not only to the personal sphere, but to the social arena? These are questions that are matters of constant debate in public discourse. When we start examining them, we quickly realize that all people have viewpoints rooted in what they see as ultimately valuable and authoritative. A Wesleyan perspective on what orders a good society based on what we, as Christians, believe to be of ultimate value and authority represents a much-needed contribution to matters of public concern.
2. At the heart of a Wesleyan social ethic is the belief that our theological commitments must shape our social commitments, not the other way around. But this is not a simple application and therefore needs exploration, discussion, and analysis to remain faithful; to present a coherent theology and a subsequently coherent living-out of that theological witness in individual lives and in the corporate arena in which we long for the flourishing of all people.
3. As Christians in the Wesleyan tradition, we believe that a properly ordered society will reflect God's will for relationships between people. This is not an argument for theocracy, but an acknowledgement that God determines right and wrong. All people can grasp something of God's goodness. *The Faith Once Delivered: A Wesleyan Witness* (TFOD) states that, "God recognizes that we are limited, and so he provides us with the ability to know him, his will, and his purposes through direct revelation and indirect revelation, such as the natural world. As the psalmist wrote, 'The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork' (Psalm 19:1)" (89). In other words, through natural revelation we can discern something of God's will (Romans 1:19-20).

4. Yet, natural or general revelation offers an incomplete picture of God's will for his creation, and particularly for humankind. Full understanding comes through special revelation; God's self-disclosure through Israel and in Jesus Christ (John 1:14; 1 Corinthians 10). This revelation is mediated now through sacred Scripture. While

there are many visions of a just society in the world, we cannot truly know right and wrong, what is just or unjust, apart from God's self-revelation and its scriptural witness. The world has many understandings of "social justice." The vision for Christians is *sanctified* justice—justice as God understands it and has communicated to humankind in Christ and through Scripture.

5. A Wesleyan social witness must be grounded in divine revelation as interpreted through the sanctified reason of the church across time. Put simply, we are not left on our own to interpret the Bible. We stand within a great cloud of witnesses (i.e. Hebrews 12:1-2) whose wisdom we may draw upon to understand what God has communicated through Scripture. This, the collective wisdom of the church, is sometimes called the church's "sanctified reason," and sometimes called "tradition." According to *TFOD*, "The Word of God in Scripture is further illumined for us by means of Tradition, exemplified in the great ecumenical creeds, often spoken of as the 'deposit of faith.' Tradition has been given by Christ to the world and has been preserved to the present and for every generation to come" (102). Thus our primary source for reflection on a Wesleyan social witness is Scripture, and we read Scripture in dialogue with the consensual tradition of Christian doctrine.

6. Our task is not to identify isolated scriptural texts to support our positions, but to read individual passages of Scripture according to what Wesley called the "general tenor" of Scripture. In other words, Wesley interpreted individual passages of Scripture within the context of the broader biblical witness. In the preface to his *Explanatory Notes Upon the Old Testament*, he wrote that this broader biblical canon has an overarching message or narrative: original sin, justification by faith, the new birth, and inward and outward holiness.

7. It is critical to understand that these theological terms (holiness, etc.) have in mind all human flourishing (Romans 12:1-2). By contrast, sin inhibits human flourishing. The Christian faith is for everyone as it is about the God who created all that is and who offers wholeness and redemption to all. The scope of God's saving purposes include all persons and all peoples (1 Timothy 2:4-5). Often, flourishing is thought of in terms of happiness, which is true as long as we understand happiness in relation to God's purposes for humanity. Happiness is not simply a subjective sense of wellbeing. Perhaps surprisingly for many people, in a Wesleyan vision happiness is always tied to

holiness, to embody the attitudes and behaviors we find in, for example, the Beatitudes of Matthew 5, with further exposition in Christ's Sermon on the Mount. They reflect the character of Christ himself who taught and commissioned his disciples to live in him and thereby reflect his character in worship of God and in all social interactions. The power to live such a life comes from divine grace, the power of God mediated to us by the presence of the Holy Spirit (*TFOD*, 113).

8. This vision of wholeness and happiness (flourishing) necessitates a realistic understanding

of the pursuit of justice. Though we have a sense of right and wrong, because we are made in God's Image, we also recognize that we have fallen short of God's glory (Romans 3:23) and need God's saving grace to heal our distorted minds and restore social/communal health. In Wesleyan terms, as we are freed "from the chains of sin, we are free to love as we ought, and as we have been created to do" (*TFOD*, 36). This foundational understanding of human beings is the essential beginning point for a Wesleyan social witness.

9. All of this is to insist on holding together as one what is often divided: a personal relationship with God and a firm commitment to the common good. There can be no splitting of this vision as if we can have a good relationship with God apart from loving our neighbors. Indeed, loving God requires us to love our neighbors and to see all of creation in view of God's great purposes. Wesley preached that Christians regard "God [as] in all things, and that we are to see the Creator in the glass of every creature; that we should use and look upon nothing as separate from God...but, with a true magnificence of thought, survey heaven and earth, and all that is therein, as contained by God in the hollow of his hand" (John Wesley, "Sermon on the Mount, III"). To love our neighbors also calls for an adequate understanding of the forces, principalities and powers that prevent humanity from experiencing the fullness of life as God created it to be and the life he offers in the redemption we have in Christ (James 4).

II. Created in the Image

10. The biblical creation story is universal; every human, without exception, is an Image bearer. We see this in the clear testimony that "male and female" are created in the Image (Genesis 5:1-2). Across human differences, we are all Image bearers.

11. The Image of God is the permanent truth about humans; it cannot be erased. It is one of the most basic truths about human beings. Human dignity is a God-given gift; we don't earn it; it's who we are. For this reason, Christian faith acts to protect and honor all humans, especially the most vulnerable (Proverbs 31:8-9; 1 Timothy 5). The Wesleyan tradition has shown this in various ways throughout history, including the work of abolitionists, an abiding concern for and engagement with the poor, and honoring the dignity of both men and women. To be human is to have dignity, whether we know it or act like it or not. We are meant to see the Image of God in one another. Image bearing is thus the basis of social relationships.

12. It is not good for humans to be alone (Genesis 2:18). Humans were created to be in a healthy and holy relationship with God, each other, and—in a different sense—with all of creation. While this is mysterious, God as Trinity is essentially relational, so it shouldn't surprise us that human personhood is also essentially relational. Our need for relationship is a gift from God. This means that holiness is always social holiness, and anything that breaks human relationship, including sexism and racism, is sin.

13. A Wesleyan ideal of holiness working in society is about how we treat *every* human being. This can be seen, for example, in John Wesley's intentionality in preaching—not only to church people—but also to coal miners, the way Wesley's writings were key in the abolition of slavery, or later during Azuza Street Revival in the intentional breaking down of barriers of race, class, and gender. It is about the ways we encourage each other to seek God (for

example, in the Wesleyan class or band meeting). A Wesleyan holiness ideal working in society must consider others, not just ourselves or our own nuclear families, when we make decisions about time, money, and social policy. We have responsibility for the church and for the society, and links in both. The church identifies our relationships as family relationships; we are all brothers and sisters by means of baptism. In society, the Wesleyan vision of holiness requires action based on God's common invitation to all people to be in transforming relationship with him, the common Image that we bear and that is being renewed in Christ, and the command of Christ to love all people as he loves us (John 13:34-35).

14. The fact that the Image of God is "male and female" is the basis of the fundamental dignity and essential equality of women and men. God created us male and female; maleness is good, and femaleness is good. This is a fundamental theological principle for thinking about human bodies, social ethics, and our relational lives together.

15. Part of the power of the early Wesleyan movement came in the belief that women are full participants in the Christian life. Their voices and experiences were celebrated. Women were integrally part of the later holiness movement as full participants, even as evangelists and preachers (e.g. Phoebe Palmer, Jarena Lee, Sojourner Truth, Amanda Berry Smith), and Wesleyan women have long been at the forefront of social reform (temperance, education, even the roots of "Mother's Day" as a protest against child labor and war). The Wesleyan movement has given voice to women. This can be seen in its early societies, its churches, and its agencies. The movement has offered support to women in society at large; often women encouraging other women with the message and social repercussions of freedom and wholeness in Christ.

16. Jesus is the perfect Image of God. The Image bearing life is directed towards God's good intentions for humans and all creation, that we and the whole world would reflect the truth about the glory of God. God loves us, and God loves the world, and so we cooperate, even co-operate, with the work of God in the world to

bring God's love to every person, to every corner of creation, looking forward to kingdom in which God will be fully glorified.

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17. As Paul wrote in numerous letters: "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation" (Col 1:15); "And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected *in* a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit" (2 Cor 3:18); "Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven" (1 Cor 15:49).

Adam's likeness, Lord, efface, Stamp Thine image in its place: Second Adam from above, Reinstat us in Thy love.

("Hark! The Herald Angels Sing," Charles Wesley)

18. The Wesleyan emphasis on grace - God's empowerment - helps us to talk about God's

transforming work; the Spirit works before we do, “preventing” or “going before” us. Renewal begins with God. This is called prevenient grace. And so the gifts we receive are not about human rank or merit but about God’s good work (John 6:44-45). Wesleyan Christianity makes room for all the gifts of the Spirit and is characterized by special confidence in the Spirit’s gracious power. We ask for grace. We ask for grace to discern the Image in other people. We ask for grace to more fully carry out what God calls us to do. Holiness in our life together is not something we achieve by our own power or take for granted, but we do pray and work toward it, trusting that the Spirit’s power can work to enable us to answer God’s call.

III. Sin

19. Fundamental to our understanding of the Wesleyan social witness in this world is the reality of human sinfulness and all of its effects (Romans 3). We live in a world that is in rebellion against its Creator. The Image of God in each of us has been marred by the impact of sin; though not erased, the *Imago Dei* has clearly been effaced. And this affects not only each person individually, but how we live together.

20. Scripture speaks of sin as any deviation from God's perfect character and intentional will for his creatures and his creation (*TFOD*, 77.) This means that sin is fundamentally in misalignment with God and his good purposes. Sinful behavior includes things done and left undone, both acts of willful rebellion and sins of omission when we ignore what is right or leave it unfulfilled. It manifests itself in individual and corporate actions, but it is far from limited to behavior. For at a deeper level, the essence of sin is our rebellion against the One who made us, and our desire to live life on our own terms rather than God's.

21. In this respect, we don't simply stumble into sin unawares, as though we have inadvertently made a bad turn on the road of life. Rather, we willfully run toward it, for until we have been redeemed by Christ, we are not just lost in our sin, we are enslaved by it. To be sure, the concept of *total depravity* does not mean that we are as bad as we possibly could be. But it does assert that the effects of sin are total and

comprehensive. Or to put it another way, there is not one area or aspect of our lives that has not been touched or corrupted by the contagion of human sinfulness. Every creature, every human institution, every relationship, every philosophy, and even our bodies, experiences, and thoughts are themselves diseased by the sin that has been transmitted to every generation.

22. Accordingly, the brokenness of sin manifests itself in a myriad of ways in the social and political environment. Wesley argued that war is proof of original sin (*The Doctrine of Original Sin*). As such, Wesleyans must approach war - even through the just war school of thought - as antithetical to God’s vision of wholeness for individuals and the world. No Wesleyan should ever glory in or romanticize war or any form of violence. Our first aim, following Christ, should be as peacemakers in the midst of a world marked by violence.

23. Wesleyan Christians acknowledge that because of sin, we are often incapable of fully recognizing the Image of God not just in ourselves, but in others as well. Sin infects our social interactions and group dynamics. We tend to focus on our own in-group, those we

feel most comfortable around, at the expense of those whom our sinful nature might perceive as the stranger or who have been hidden from broader society. At the root of such issues as ethnic strife, our treatment of the unborn, those differently abled, and those in the twilight of life, is our failure to truly value others as God values them. Absorbed in ourselves, we not only overlook those around us, as well as the contributions which they may be making to the world, but we rob them of their dignity by seeing them as “others.” The discrimination and marginalization of others is not only unjust, it’s un-Christian.

24. Similarly, human sinfulness can create an economic environment of greed that ignores the plight of others. The turn of the soul to self-preservation by striving for dominion over others betrays an inner spiritual life marked by selfishness. Thus, rather than share God's concern for those who have less (Leviticus 19.9-10, Matthew 25.37-40, James 2.1-5), and working to alleviate the conditions and address policies that give rise to poverty, unfettered greed and love of personal gain overcome a biblical call to self-sacrifice for the sake of human flourishing.

25. Sin is a condition that has impacted even the created order itself, for as Romans 8:20 proclaims, “the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it.” Though summoned to care for the earth as our common home, stewarding its resources and sharing in its bounty, we have often failed to exercise responsible and sustainable consumption not only so that we may replenish creation, but so that we may ensure that the abundance of the earth can provide for the needs of all that inhabit it.

26. As Wesley put it: “By one man’s disobedience...as many as were then in the loins of their forefather, ‘were made’ or constituted ‘sinners.’ Not only deprived of the favor of God, but also of this Image, of all virtue, righteousness, and true holiness, and sunk, partly into the image of the devil,— in pride, malice, and all other diabolical tempers; partly into the image of the brute, being fallen under the dominion of brutal passions and groveling appetites. Hence also death entered into the world, with all his forerunner and attendants,—pain, sickness, and a whole train of uneasy, as well as unholy, passions and tempers” (“God’s Love to Fallen Man”).

27. Until we are transformed by grace and the renewing of our minds, we will continue to conform to the pattern of this world rather than be about the task of cooperating with God’s work of transforming both the world and those within it (Romans 12). Just as we must battle against sin within our own hearts, so too we must resist unjust structures and institutions that sinful individuals have built. These are important objectives of Christian social and political witness in a Wesleyan context. And fortunately, God has already provided a solution to the contagion of human sin in the person of Jesus Christ.

IV. Salvation

28. In *The Faith Once Delivered*, 131, we are reminded that Wesley emphasized a salvation experience that imparted two kinds of freedom: *freedom from* and *freedom to*. The document states that “[p]erfect love is freedom from the being of sin. Justification is freedom from the guilt of sin, the new birth is freedom from the power or dominion of sin, and entire sanctification is nothing less than freedom from the being of sin. Entire sanctification is

freedom to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength and to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mark 12:29-31).”

29. Salvation necessarily directs one’s attention to the social impact of Christian witness. The first “legal” repentance that is produced out of the kindness of God’s patient judgment (Romans 2) leads to a keen personal awareness of the corrupting influence of sin in our world. The second “evangelizing” repentance is an ongoing awareness of the influence of sin as it has impacted human social life, and occurs simultaneously with the perfecting work of the Spirit in the life of the Christian. This second “evangelical” repentance, then, spurs the mature Christian to examine society and culture with an eye for injustice and the brokenness that is symptomatic of the corrupted nature of humanity. Personal relationship with God, mediated by the salvific experience and the further indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and empowered by personal and social commitments to holiness, enables the person to distinguish the will of God for holy living.

30. Because the Christian is aware of the need for repentance regarding injustices in the world that have been committed with both the willful and passive consent of humanity, they accept the call of God to actively engage the culture with the intent to act as God’s ambassadors of reconciliation in the world (2 Corinthians 5:16-21). In so doing, they are living out their salvation by being the hands and feet of Christ, serving as a priesthood of believers striving to advance the purposes of the Kingdom of God as represented in the final vision of the New Creation (Revelation 21). Making repentance the “porch of religion,” as John Wesley called it, means centrally placing the inhabitation and participation in the broader community a core tenet of Wesleyan faith and practice, especially as it relates to doing no harm, doing good, and employing the means of grace (see The General Rules).

31. Wesley saw repentance as the porch of religion and justification as the door to new life in Christ (*The Principles of a Methodist Farther Explained*). His one word definition of justification, however, was “pardon” (“Scripture Way of Salvation”). Faith is the one thing necessary to justification and makes a person right with God, their past sins having been forgiven. But the doctrine of justification has social repercussions for the Wesleyan believer. God’s pardoning love for us should inspire us to extend that same pardoning love to others. God’s gifts for us as individuals are meant to be expressed in the communities he has called us to be a part.

32. Historically, this recognition of God’s gifts of faith, pardon, and love have been variously embodied in practical ways by Wesleyans in the strength of their attention to the needs of the poor, opposition to the practice of slavery, and a commitment to the temperance movement. Above all, this commitment can only be successfully achieved when based on the ongoing process of entire sanctification.

33. The Wesleyan emphasis on entire sanctification, or the wholeness made possible by God’s grace in this life, is a doctrine that speaks of the Father’s work in and through the Spirit to make us like Christ on an individual basis but also, at the same time, within communities made whole by that same cleansing power. Wesley believed that we will not be made whole on our own; we need one another for accountability (i.e., social holiness). But the doctrine’s connection to community is one that transcends accountability. Believers are made whole so that the love of Christ becomes the reigning attribute of the heart (Colossians 3:14). Subsequently the heart will – by the nature of love itself – seek ways to

enable wholeness in others, spiritually and practically.

34. The love that is at the heart of Christian perfection is a love that overcomes boundaries of nation, language, and tribe. It is a transforming love that does not leave us stuck in sin on the individual level nor at the level of social evils. God's love conquers all. And those made whole by that love will seek the good of the other, both on the individual and corporate levels.

35. Within Wesleyan thought, the doctrine of entire sanctification or Christian perfection is driven by grace, but not a grace that limits the cooperative work of human beings with the work of God. Rather, this grace makes cooperation possible. Wesley argued that since God works we can work, and because God works we must work ("On Working Out Your Salvation"). Grace inspires and enables. It makes us responsible not only for our own actions but as participants in a broken world in which all persons have been called to the wholeness made possible in Christ.

36. In the history of the Wesleyan movement, the repercussions of entire sanctification on social witness have been immense. This doctrine lay at the heart of Methodist abolitionist arguments that freedom from sin implies freedom from other forms of bondage. Christian perfection also inspired men and women to preach about their experience and ultimately led to greater opportunities for men and women in the life of the church and society. This same vision of wholeness inspired the creation of homes for abandoned children, shelters for the homeless, Methodist hospitals to care for the body as the soul, and thousands of schools, colleges, and universities expressing the belief that holiness and knowledge led to human flourishing.

37. It can also be argued that the doctrine of entire sanctification and the requirements it places on community can help to begin to construct a Wesleyan view of various forms of community including government. The basic expectations implied by the corporate nature of sanctification include the expectation that communities are constructed in such a way that flourishing is not only possible but encouraged by design.

38. It is within this optimistic and hopeful view of God's gracious work in the world that Wesleyans view the role of government, or its potential. There is no singular Wesleyan view of government. The first Methodists were monarchists and some remain as such. Many others live under other forms of government. In either case, a Wesleyan view is not simply to see government as limiting human vice but instead as a means by which flourishing - economic, social, religious, etc. - can take place safely. Wesleyans are not anarchists. And while some may not like everything that their government has done or does, they believe that God has given us authorities for our betterment.

39. Government is called to enable human flourishing within society such that the common good is possible while taking seriously the freedom we have as Image-bearers. There is an inherent balance in this view; maintaining the freedom we have as Image-bearers, enabling flourishing at every level of corporate life, and maintaining structures, policies, and enforcement necessary to provide peace and stability at the individual and corporate levels. Good government enables humanity to play its role as steward of creation as God intended, even while government cannot make us righteous or ultimately change human hearts.

Government does not replace the ongoing work of the church, nor the church's responsibility to engage a hurting world. The church has a calling that far exceeds that of government; only God can truly transform the created order.

40. The Wesleyan Christian witness within government is to promote human flourishing, respect for freedom, and to remind society - in and through government but not limited to it - of its responsibility to the least, the vulnerable, and the poor. When governments overstep their bounds or forget their mandate, we are called as witnesses to a scriptural faith to offer correction. Like Wesley, Wesleyans today must address immediate social issues, but also look at the entirety of society and its systems,

calling it back at every level to its purposes for true human flourishing, ultimately seen in God's great work of new creation.

V. New Creation and Mission

41. The vision of the new creation reveals the purpose for human existence in which God's holiness permeates all. The image of the New Jerusalem descending from heaven shows the intrinsic connection between holiness and peace (Revelation 21:1-4). Peace is not simply the absence of hostility but the presence of wholeness, healing, and abundant life. In this sense, peace incorporates the notion of *shalom* or a wholeness of relations in which all things are made whole in God's holy love.

42. In the book of Revelation, the New Jerusalem allows the glory of God's holiness to flow through the nations, binding them together in a new society that takes root in a new heaven and earth. God is all in all as divine holiness gives light to the city in the fulness of peace, unifying every people, tribe, nation, and tongue in the worship of Christ. This revelation of the final purpose of God's plan impacts the social witness of the church in its participation in God's mission today.

43. Holiness has always been embodied. This can be seen first in the good creation and extends to God's calling of the people of Israel. In the Incarnation holiness is embodied in the very person of Jesus of Nazareth. And in his bodily resurrection, launching the new creation, holiness concerns our bodies as well as our souls. It is not so much an attribute that humans possess as a condition that represents the wholeness reflected in what it means to be a person in the Image of God. The unity of body and soul comprises a human person. To be a person is more than to be a collection of attributes or a bundle of cells. This is different from the modern idea of the individual where to remove an attribute such as consciousness is to cease to be a person. Such definitions undergird the denial of full personal dignity to infants in the womb, the mental or physically challenged, minorities, or the elderly. Christians believe that the full identity of the person as body and soul is affirmed and brought to completion in the divine communion that is the city of God.

44. Since the people of God still see through a glass darkly, they look upon the New Jerusalem as a final state only God can bring about. There is no utopian society that can be brought about on earth. Christians who have sought to merge the city of God with the earthly city have invariably traded God's vision for an idolatrous one. Even

though Christians pursue the common good, we must recognize that no single nation can fulfill this goal other than the New Jerusalem. God alone can wipe away every tear and heal every disease. At the same time, God invites the church to cooperate in his work to heal the nations now. Christians who seek to withdraw from civil society in the name of preserving and protecting the church have wrongly understood the mission of God in the world to transform persons and societies. The church is called to engage the world with both the message of God's transforming love but also to engage in acts of love that reflect God's good will for the creation he loves.

45. The fullness of the human person takes its proper place in human society through the church. This community does not seek to make a name for itself. Rather, as the people of God, restored by the Spirit as Charles Wesley wrote to be "divine facsimiles" or "transcripts of the Trinity," to reflect God to the world. God's Spirit enables us to speak wisely, to offer gifts for healing, wonders, insight, the ability to settle conflicts, and to communicate across differences.

46. The traditions born of the Wesleyan movement encourage the ongoing formation of the people of God in holiness. The hallmark of present-day participants in the Wesleyan movement should be a people holding one another accountable in agreement on the general shape of a holy life as focused both upon the doctrine of salvation and the relationship between grace, faith, and holiness of heart and life.

47. God's Word reveals the depth of human capacity to distort creation and society and exposes the futility of our continued efforts to make a name for ourselves, to seek the good without God, or to build kingdoms in the name of God on earth. Convinced that biblical faith is made evident by works of piety and mercy (James 2:17) and clinging to Jesus' exhortation that when we fail to do for the least of these we likewise have not done so for Christ either (Matthew 25:45), we feed the hungry, visit those in prison, oppose slavery, and care for those less fortunate.

48. Above all, we strive to be obedient to our Lord Jesus Christ's command to "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I [Jesus] have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20). Christianity requires more recognizable behavior that is Christ-like. Among a world filled with those who oppress, and ignore, and manipulate, and lie, and kill, let us, in the words of the prophet Isaiah (1:16b-17): cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.