



# The Methodist Church in Singapore

## The Methodist Social Principles

The Social Principles are a reminder of our Wesleyan concern for personal as well as social holiness. Affirming our desire for full salvation, which will lead us to avoid evil, do good and obey God, Methodists have sought to articulate what is good and right, and what is to be avoided in today's world.

Following the brief preamble that summarises the basis for social concern in our Methodist heritage and theology, eight principles are listed: The Sphere of the Family; The Sphere of Economics; The Sphere of Politics; The Sphere of Community Life; The Sphere of the Internet, Sciences and Technologies; The Sphere of Social Well-being; The Sphere of Creation Care; and The Sphere of the Church.

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### Section I. Our Methodist Heritage

1. Christian social responsibility is rooted in the teachings of the Bible and guided by Christian tradition. It is an integral part of the Gospel which the Church is expected to proclaim, preserve and practise.

2. The Methodist Church has a special interest in social concerns because of its desire to be obedient to Christ in bringing the whole of life with its activities, possessions, relationships and environment into conformity with the will of God. Such obedience is exemplified in the life and labour of John Wesley who ministered to the physical, intellectual, spiritual and social needs of the people to whom he preached the Gospel of salvation.

3. It is out of our gratitude for God's love and in affirmation of our belief in the inestimable worth of each person and the integrity of God's creation, that we renew our commitment to become faithful witnesses to the Gospel and to live a life of personal and social holiness.

## **Section II. Our Methodist Theological Basis for Social Concerns**

1. We believe that God is the Creator of all people, regardless of race, creed, status or sex, and that each person is of infinite worth. We believe that all persons have supreme value in the sight of God and ought to be so regarded by us.

2. We believe that "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof". Our own abilities and all we possess are gifts from God entrusted to us for responsible stewardship.

3. We believe that God in Christ is seeking to redeem all people and the world. We believe that the grace of God in Christ is available for redemption from personal and social sins as we seek to do His Holy will in penitence and obedience.

4. Since Jesus died and was raised from the dead for the redemption of all people, we should live to help save humanity from sin and from every influence which would harm or destroy a person. All ideologies, institutions and practices will be tested by their effect upon persons.

5. The Methodist Church views the perplexing times and problems we face today in the light of the life and teaching of Jesus. Jesus teaches us to love God and our neighbours and to seek justice for all. To remain silent and passive in the face of poverty, discrimination, injustice and exploitation is to deny Christ.

### **Section III. Our Methodist Social Principles**

The following Social Principles are formulated as a response of the Methodist Church in Singapore to human issues in the contemporary world. They are based on a biblical and theological foundation enriched by our Methodist tradition. The Social Principles call on all members of the Methodist Church in Singapore to a prayerful response of faith and practice.

#### **The Sphere of the Family**

We affirm the importance and sanctity of the family. We believe that the healthy family unit forms a basic social environment in which responsible teachings can be imparted, moral values disseminated, and where love is shared and the worth of each person is affirmed. We deplore and reject values and morals which undermine the sanctity of family life.

##### **1. The Marital Relationship and Divorce.**

- a) We affirm the sanctity of the marriage covenant which is expressed in love, mutual support, personal commitment, and fidelity between a man and a woman. We reject social norms that assume different standards for women and men in marriage.
- b) The Church views with great concern the increasing number of divorces and affirms the need for adequate premarital and marital counselling as well as marriage enrichment programmes. We also encourage an active and supportive commitment of the church and our society to minister in love to the divorced and their families.

##### **2. Parent-Child Relationships.**

- a) We affirm the shared responsibility for parenting by men and women and encourage social, economic, and religious efforts to enhance and strengthen relationships within families.
- b) We recognise the burden of single parent families and their need for understanding, care and support from the community and the Church.

c) We view with concern the diminishing time available for families to be together in our modern society. Families need to give priority to spending quality time together in worship and recreation for family life enrichment.

d) We believe that children have a duty to honour, respect and care for their parents especially in sickness and old age.

### 3. God's Gift of Sex.

a) We recognise that human sexuality is a gift of God. Sexual intercourse is a sacred experience only when it is accompanied by the love and fidelity of a holy matrimony between a man and a woman. We believe that sexual intercourse outside the bonds of matrimony is contrary to the will of God.

b) We recognise that the issue of sexuality is divisive because it is also deeply personal to our identity. While not the only characteristic, sexuality is an important part of our humanity. However, the fallen human condition also includes sexual brokenness, the condition by which our perception of sex has distorted what God has intended sex to be.

c) We affirm that as Christians, the fundamental ground of our identity is found in Christ alone – regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, social status or sexuality.

d) We acknowledge that sexual brokenness, which afflicts all humanity, is manifested in several ways, including the exploitation of sex, addiction to pornography, same-sex attraction, and gender dysphoria.

e) We deplore all forms of commercialisation and exploitation of sex with their consequent degradation of human personhood. We denounce the widespread distribution of pornographic and other sex-exploitative materials made easily accessible through social media.

f) We recognise that pornography is a growing problem which has also preyed upon young children. It degrades and distorts God's gift of sex, and debases our view of humans who are persons with dignity and not objects of sexual abuse and fantasy.

- g) We affirm that persons suffering from sexual brokenness are of sacred worth to God and all believers are called by Jesus to a life of self-denial and discipleship.
- h) We believe that persons who wrestle with sexual brokenness, such as same-sex attraction, gender dysphoria, or addiction to pornography, need the healing and transforming power of God's grace and the welcoming hospitality of the church. The Church should minister and guide such persons with faithfulness, courage, and love, that out of their brokenness they may grow in holiness.
- i) We consider homosexual acts to be incompatible with God's design for sex and incompatible with Christian teachings.
- j) We affirm the integrity of single persons and reject all social practices and pressures that discriminate; and social attitudes that are prejudiced against persons who are not married.

#### 4. Birth Control and Abortion.

- a) We believe that planned parenthood, practised with respect for human life, fulfils rather than violates the will of God. It is the duty of each married couple to prayerfully and responsibly seek parenthood or defer it in accordance with the best expression of Christian love.
- b) We affirm that life begins at conception. We therefore do not subscribe to abortion except on medical grounds. We call on Christians to a searching and prayerful inquiry in situations in which abortion may be contemplated and to seek medical, pastoral, and other appropriate counselling.
- c) We call on churches to provide safe counselling spaces to guide and offer support for anyone who has had or may be contemplating abortion.

#### 5. Infertility and Assisted Methods of Reproduction.

- a) We affirm that every child is a gift and not a right to be demanded from God. Procreation is always by the grace of God and not simply a product of modern science even when assisted methods of human reproduction are used.

- b) We recognise that infertility may be a cause of suffering for some married couples. We accept the procedures of assisted human reproduction which can be regarded as methods to assist natural reproduction as long as the eggs or sperms of another person or surrogate mothers are not used.
- c) Married couples who are burdened with the problem of infertility should prayerfully examine their motives for wanting a child and consider the medical, spiritual, moral and legal implications of assisted reproductive procedures.
- d) Married couples who love children may consider sharing their love by adopting or fostering children into their families.
- e) We denounce surrogacy as a means for persons to have a child or for sex selection. We believe that this is not God's divine plan for the family.

### **The Sphere of Economics**

We believe all economic systems are under the judgement of God and that we need to test each aspect of every economic system by the teachings of the Bible and to judge its practices and impact by its contribution towards the common good.

1. Property and Possessions. We believe that ownership of property is a trusteeship under God and all our possessions are a trust from God to be managed responsibly. It is contrary to our Christian faith for any person or group of persons to have exclusive and arbitrary control of any part of the created universe.

2. The Acquisition of Wealth.

- a) We support all honest measures that would reduce the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few. We should ensure that materialistic progress does not undermine our family, weaken our community spirit, dehumanise the individual, and destroy the natural environment.
- b) We accept that wealth creation can enrich the nation, find jobs for the citizens and enhance the living standards of the population. Yet wealth creation must not be done by exploiting cheap labour, using unsustainable natural resources, widening

the income gap between the rich and the poor, or promoting a selfish profligate lifestyle.

### 3. A Simple Lifestyle and Consumerism.

- a) We call on all Christians to adopt a simple lifestyle and to be ever conscious and vigilant against the influence of consumerism which thrives on pride, greed and the human propensity to acquire more than we need.
- b) We need to evaluate our personal and business practices so that we will not be influenced and controlled by the standards and values of an acquisitive society and an extravagant and wasteful lifestyle.
- c) A simple lifestyle is not a call for an ascetic life. It is a spiritual discipline that promotes godliness with contentment, and increases our awareness of God's presence and providence in our lives. A simple lifestyle frees us to be more sensitive to the needs of the poor and the beauty of God's world.

## **The Sphere of Politics**

The Christian point of view demands that concentrations of power in government, industry, business, and religious organisations be used responsibly for the well-being of the community. Power that is godly must be enabling and liberative and should not be confused with abusive and coercive force.

### 1. Political Responsibilities.

- a) We believe that all governments are under the sovereignty of God.
- b) "Separation of Church and State" means no organic union of the two but does permit reciprocal constructive interaction. The Church should continually exert a strong moral influence upon the State, by supporting policies and programmes which are just and compassionate and opposing policies and programmes which are not.
- c) We believe that consensus building promotes social peace and order. It helps to provide an environment for healthy exchanges of ideas in a fair and transparent

manner. However, decision making by consensus is fair and effective only if the people have sufficient and safe channels opened for them to participate in meaningful and honest discussions, without fear of reprisal.

d) We will pray for all those in authority in public service and support their efforts to secure justice, benefits, and equal opportunities for the well-being of the society.

## 2. The Christian and military service.

a) We believe that, in general, war goes against the teachings and example of Christ and that the influence of the Church should be on the side of every effort seeking to remove the seeds of war. In the event of widespread threats to peace and justice, war may be supported as a last resort.

b) The Methodist Church teaches respect for civil authority that is properly constituted. It encourages both love of country and of all people. It believes that the security and defence of the country is the responsibility of every able-bodied citizen.

## 3. Building a World Community.

a) We stand for the promotion of international goodwill, peace and understanding among all nations. We believe that international cooperation based on mutual respect will foster peace and build consensus for a better world order.

b) We call for stronger action to be taken against human and drug trafficking around the world. We denounce sex tourism which often exploit vulnerable and poor women and children.

c) We support fair trade among nations, and not just free trade which sometimes penalises the poor for the benefit and pleasure of the rich.

d) We are appalled by refugee problems and sufferings caused by prolonged wars, racial and religious conflicts, political turmoil and persecution. While such entrenched problems cannot be easily resolved because of the complexities of global politics, the United Nations and richer countries in the world should provide



leadership in offering safe havens for the refugees and support for them to be resettled.

e) We affirm our historic concern for the world which belongs to God and strive for all persons and peoples to enjoy full and equal membership in a truly world community.

### **The Sphere of Community Life**

We recognise that Singapore is a multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-religious society and we believe that everyone is of equal worth in God's sight regardless of our creed, race, sex, age, or social status. We seek to work towards societies in which each person's unique value is recognised, affirmed, and strengthened.

#### 1. Multi-religious Understanding.

a) We believe that it is necessary and healthy to engage in open and honest dialogue with persons of other faiths in a spirit of love, mutual respect and sensitivity.

b) We affirm the right of religious groups to exercise their faith without undue legal, political or financial impediments.

c) We believe that legitimate religious groups have the right to share their faith openly and honestly without misrepresenting or denigrating the faiths of others.

#### 2. Multi-racial Harmony.

a) We believe that a key foundation of racial harmony is love, mutual respect, and acceptance of our neighbours regardless of their race and religious beliefs.

b) Racism inhibits and cripples our growth in Christ as it is antithetical to the Gospel itself. Racial pride and prejudice left unchecked is a potential source of inter-racial strife and conflict.

c) We rejoice in the gifts which each ethnic history and culture brings to our total life. We further assert the rights of members of racial and ethnic minorities to equal opportunities in employment and promotion; in education and training; in voting; in

public housing; in different avenues of leadership and in all aspects of community life.

### 3. Rights of Women.

a) We affirm women and men to be equal in every aspect of their common life.

Women should therefore be given equal treatment in employment, promotion, compensation and citizenship privileges. We recognise the importance of women in decision-making positions at all levels of life.

4. Rights of the Aged. We support social policies that integrate the aging into the life of the total community, including sufficient incomes, increased and nondiscriminatory employment opportunities beyond retirement, educational and service opportunities, and adequate medical care and housing.

5. Rights of Children. We recognise that parents and society in general have special obligations to children. Children should not be deprived of education, food, shelter, clothing and health care. Furthermore, they must be protected from economic and sexual exploitation.

6. Rights of the Disabled. We affirm the responsibility of the church and society to minister to the needs of persons with mental, physical and/or psychological disabilities. We urge the church and society to help disabled persons to enable them to be full participants in the community of faith and the society at large. They should be given adequate access to public amenities, transport, job opportunities, and social gatherings.

### 7. Rights and Social Responsibilities.

a) It is important to make a distinction between a selfish and self-centred attitude to life and a healthy self-respect and self-love.

b) It is when we have a healthy self-affirmative love that we are able to love our neighbours as ourselves.

c) We believe that it is only when we recognise and fulfil our social responsibilities and obligations that our basic human rights will be respected. The

affirmation of basic human rights and social responsibilities is based on who we are as persons made in the image of God.

#### 8. The Pursuit of Excellence.

- a) We believe that excellence should not be pursued only in academic achievements, economic prosperity or productivity. We need also to strive for excellence in artistic, creative and spiritual endeavours, and more importantly in the cultivation of Christian virtues.
- b) We believe that a lifestyle grounded on spiritual values and Christian virtues is our best defence against a blind utilitarian, selfish and materialistic approach to life.

### **The Sphere of the Internet, Sciences and Technologies**

The Internet is a ubiquitous presence in modern life. It is experienced both as a communications network and more so as an environment which surrounds us; a sphere which we inhabit. We affirm the gifts of the Internet and other Technologies, and how they can support Christian faith and practice. However, we remain cautious about how the Internet, Sciences and Technologies can be harnessed in ways inimical to Christian morality.

#### 1. The Mitigated Good of the Internet

- a) We believe that the Internet has served as a powerful tool for education, commercial activity, intercultural dialogue, political participation, and mutual understanding. It can also serve the cause of Christianity.
- b) We support the right development and responsible use of the Internet, for the sake of humanity. These include, but are not limited to, fostering justice, peace, and the common good; the building of all levels of civil society; the development of solidarity with our fellow humans nationally and internationally.
- c) We believe that relationships formed through online engagement are not always superficial or fleeting and can in fact be life-giving expressions of mutual love. We do not, however, believe that these can adequately replace offline communities and direct interaction with people.

## 2. The Challenges of the Internet

- a) We caution against an overzealous and uncritical adoption of digital and Internet Technologies that fails to discern possible deleterious effects, such as those of an anti-authoritarian and anti-religious tenor, or the rampant emphasis on individual liberty held in opposition to or at the expense of wider societal well-being.
- b) We note the ways in which the Internet has made some forms of antisocial behaviour and evil easier, such as access to pornography; the nefarious use of it by paedophiles, traffickers, hate groups and terrorists; plagiarism and theft of intellectual property; issues relating to security, privacy and anonymity; falsehoods, rumours, and character assassinations. We do not see the Internet as the source of these societal evils. We only acknowledge that these dangers are exacerbated by technical features of the Internet.

## 3. Christians in the Internet Age

- a) We therefore call on Christians to inhabit the sphere of the Internet as they would the physical – not by sectarianism or isolationism, but by patient and faithful public witness to the Gospel. The Internet landscape is no less a sphere in which we must be faithful to our Lord.
- b) The fast-developing technology and saturation of the Internet in everyday life requires a robust Christian faith and practice in response to new moral conundrums and circumstances. We urge all Christians to engage the unique challenges of the Internet by bringing to this realm a distinctive Christian moral vision and practice. The task of Christians is to adopt a critical mind, and learn to pay attention to the benefits and costs the Internet will bring, and to point the way to a faithful inhabitation of the Internet in the life of the children of God.

3. The Use of other Technologies. We affirm that all technology is a gift from God and may contribute to the well-being of all people and societies. However, we believe scientific and technological knowledge must be applied with spiritual wisdom if technology is not to be abused or to become a burden to society.

- a) In an ever-changing world of information technologies, bio-medical sciences, and artificial intelligence, the application of such scientific advances should be

welcomed if they enhance the quality of life for the whole community, and not just for a privileged group of people.

b) Advances in sciences must not be allowed to divide the community, devalue human dignity and identity as persons created and loved by God.

### **The Sphere of Social Well-being**

We affirm that it is a desirable Christian virtue for a person to place the overall interest and welfare of the community before the interest of the self. Each person has been endowed with gifts and graces which can contribute to the development of a compassionate society.

#### **1. Caring for the Poor.**

a) We believe that meeting human needs is both a private and public responsibility. We need to be conscious of the plights of the poor and powerless in our society and the world.

b) We believe that it is our Christian duty to provide opportunities for education and training for the poor to upgrade and be gainfully employed.

c) We have to practise love with action, reaching out to and supporting works and social policies which will alleviate and overcome the systemic problems and obstacles faced by the poor and vulnerable people in our society.

#### **2. The Promotion of Workers' Welfare.**

a) We stand for reasonable hours of work, for fair wages and for just and proper working conditions. All workers, including migrant workers, should be given time for leisure and recreation. Employees and employers alike have the right to organise for collective bargaining and well-being.

b) We fully support public and private programmes of economic security for old age and adequate insurance coverage for sickness and injury.

c) We believe in the dignity of labour and that unemployment tends to destroy human self-respect. We regard our vocations as spheres of service to God.

d) Domestic helpers and migrant workers are also persons of infinite worth, loved by God and they must not be treated as disposable cheap labourers. They should be given fair wages, provided with proper hygienic housing, offered satisfactory medical and life insurance coverage, and adequate protection from being exploited by unscrupulous employers and agents.

e) We urge Christian employers of domestic helpers and migrant workers to regard such employment as an opportunity for ministry to those from less developed countries. Our care for them and how well we treat them is part of our Christian witness.

### 3. The Provision of Health Care.

a) We affirm that our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit and that it is our Christian responsibility to adopt healthy lifestyles. We also believe that affordable basic health care for physical and mental illnesses must be available to all.

b) We recognise overeating, alcoholism, drug abuse, and smoking as major factors which contribute to illness and premature deaths. We discourage overeating and the consumption of alcohol and tobacco and fully support all educational programmes to change these unhealthy lifestyles. We believe that the Church is called to be a healing and redemptive fellowship for those struggling with these problems.

c) We affirm God's sovereignty in healing and the need for medical resources to be used with common sense and compassion. Medical treatments are God's gifts to humankind for healing and restoration of health.

d) We affirm the maintenance of stringent controls in testing new technologies and drugs. Humans must not be used as first-line experimental test subjects for biomedical research. Research and drugs should only be applied for general use after rigorous testing by the researchers, and clearance from an appropriate ethics committee or a recognised institutional review board.

### 4. Caring for the Dying and Euthanasia.

- a) We believe that God is always seeking to alleviate human suffering and we are called to be the channels of His grace and love to those who are dying.
- b) The time between the diagnosis of terminal illness and the event of death can be transformed into a time of blessing and an opportunity for emotional and spiritual growth through the loving concern of those providing hospice care.
- c) We do not subscribe to euthanasia for those who are terminally ill as euthanasia fails to recognise the spiritual dimension of life and it goes against the Christian teaching on the sanctity of life. We fully endorse hospice care as the more humane alternative to euthanasia.

5. Ministry to Drug Addicts. We support regulations that protect society from the abuse of drugs. The drug dependent person is an individual of infinite worth in need of treatment and rehabilitation. Drug abuse should be viewed as a symptom of wider disorders for which remedies should be sought.

6. Ministry to Prisoners.

- a) In the love of Christ who came to save those who are lost, we need to minister to those in prisons and their families. We should also promote systems of rehabilitation that will restore, preserve, and nurture the humanity of the imprisoned.
- b) We support legislations and social policies to reduce and eliminate crime.
- c) Capital punishment is a blunt instrument which must be exercised with utmost care. It should be used rarely and only after open and fair trial and following the due process of the law. A Christian approach to criminal law must be marked by both justice and mercy.

7. Gambling.

- a) Gambling is an expression of one's desire to instant wealth. It is a form of bondage and a social sickness motivated by greed and covetousness. It is also a menace to society as it compromises the best interests of moral, social, economic, and spiritual life of the community.

b) We do not subscribe to any form of gambling.

### **The Sphere of Creation Care**

All creation is the Lord's and we are called to be responsible stewards of water, air, soil, minerals, energy resources, plants, animal life and outer space. We believe the Church has the responsibility and power to inculcate higher moral and spiritual values which are necessary to address the problems raised by the environmental crisis, the abuses of technological advances and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

#### 1. Conservation of Natural Resources.

a) We support and encourage policies aimed at conservation of our natural resources, the prevention of pollution of our air, water and soil, the protection of wild life and the humane treatment of animals.

b) We call for a cessation to wanton destruction of natural forest which upset biodiversity and the complex ecosystem of the world.

c) We should seek to use natural resources responsibly, avoiding unsustainable and wasteful lifestyle and value system at home, in church and in our society.

d) We speak against illegal trading of wildlife, including plants and fish, birds, and animals.

### **The Sphere of the Church**

Underlining our response to the challenges of our time and how we ought to bring our faith to bear on such challenges must be our understanding of our calling and identity as Christians and faithful members of the Church. The Church is a community of believers who are loved by God, informed and shaped by the Gospel of Jesus Christ and sanctified by the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. It is a community where Christians are taught by scripture, instructed by tradition, enriched by reason and affirmed by the corporate experience of the followers of Christ. The moral vision of the community which informs our social principles must be guided by virtues which every Christian should cultivate. The Church, to be faithful to its calling



and identity, must teach and nourish its members to help us be the Church which God has intended for us to be. It is from our understanding of who we are as members of the Church and the virtues that form our character and undergird our ethics that we can be responsible and responsive in applying our faith to the vexatious issues of our time.

## 1. The Church and Christian Virtues

a) We commend Christians to cultivate and practise the virtues of the Christian faith, so that, by the Holy Spirit, we may acquire these virtues and manifest them in the way we think and the way we live our life, wherever God may place us.

b) Even where immediate answers to specific questions arising from a rapidly developing world are not possible, we can still show faith, hope and love; together with the development of the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude as the sure and steady guides for Christian character formation and practice.

c) These virtues of the Christian life are trustworthy and truthful, providing the anchor for the Church's moral vision and practice even if vices should take hold of the wider cultural imagination.

## 2. The Church and the Great Commandment

a) It is an unambiguous teaching of Jesus Christ that the Great Commandment calls us to love the Lord our God with our heart, soul, mind and strength; and to love our neighbour as ourselves. A true mark of a Christian and the Church must be the clear evidence of our commitment to obey and to live out the Great Commandment which should energise us for faithful Christian witness in word and action, being and behaviour.

b) Loving God with our whole self requires total commitment to God. It means letting God be at the centre of our life as much as He should be at the centre of our Church. It means that we should refuse to follow the teachings of the world which compromise our love for God and His Kingdom. Our priority must be to seek first God's Kingdom and His righteousness, and not the shallow, spurious, and self-serving teachings of the gods of this world.

#### **Section IV. Our Methodist Social Creed**

1. We believe in God, Creator of the world, and in Jesus Christ the Redeemer of creation. We believe in the Holy Spirit, through whom we acknowledge God's gifts, and we repent of our sin in misusing these gifts for selfish pleasure and gain.
2. We affirm the natural world as God's handiwork and dedicate ourselves as responsible stewards to its care, preservation, enhancement, and faithful use by humankind.
3. We joyfully receive for ourselves and others, the blessings of community, sexuality, marriage and the family.
4. We commit ourselves to the rights of men, women, children, youth, young adults, the aging, the dying, and those with handicaps; to improvement in the quality of life, and to the rights and dignity of racial, ethnic, and religious minorities.
5. We believe in the right and duty of persons to work for the good of themselves and others; in the rights of property as a trust from God, collective bargaining, and the cultivation of a simple lifestyle; and in the elimination of economic and social distress and injustices.
6. We dedicate ourselves to peace throughout the world, to freedom for all people, and to the rule of justice and law among nations.
7. We believe in the present and final triumph of God in human affairs, and affirm that the earth belongs to God and the fullness thereof.
8. We commit ourselves to live a responsible life informed by the teachings of the Bible and nurtured by the instructions of the Church that will glorify God in our thoughts, words and deeds. In the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.