

Christian Community Churches of Australia

Perspective on our Public Voice

Public Statements

What right do we have to freedom of religion?

We have been created for freedom of thought, conscience, and will.

Any freedom of religion we experience in a fallen world is grace not a right.

What role do we have in the public square?

We are called at all times, whether in freedom or in the face of opposition, to represent God to the world through both character and confession, calling authorities to be good stewards of all that has been placed under their care and to serve his purposes here on earth as in heaven.

We are to call the powers that be toward a freedom of thought, conscience, and religion that allows humans to flourish as image bearers, to become all that God intended.

How should we communicate in the public square?

Our public square voice must be one of wisdom, integrity, embrace, one of being for all humanity.

Public Summary

We are all created in the image of God. Being created in his image includes being created with freedom of thought, of conscience, and of will. We are also created with the responsibility of being good stewards of the world on behalf of God.

Currently, by the grace of God, in Australia we experience a form of religious freedom, by constitution and international covenant. Such freedoms must be viewed by Christians not as a right but as a privilege. Our current experience of freedom of religion within Australia is to be embraced as grace to be enjoyed as we openly and diligently serve God. It is not to be viewed as a right we have because we are Australian. However, given the freedom to choose for or against God, we now find ourselves in a world that is often opposed to God, and living under structures of authority that while God ordained are not always God honouring.

We always live in a place of tension, living under the power of the State and also under the requirements of the kingdom of our God. Our lives are to always bring honour to God which includes submitting to and honouring the present State authorities where their requirements upon us do not call us to dishonour God. What if the authorities restrict our freedom as Christians? For each situation that we find ourselves in we are called to represent God faithfully. Therefore, whether in freedom or in the face of opposition, we are called at all times to represent God in and to the world through both godly character and confession.

What is our specific active role in the public square? Rulers are put in place to be good stewards of all God has put under their care, to ensure his creation flourishes. Where those in power do not rule justly, where they neglect to have care and compassion for the poor and disadvantaged, and where evil rather than good is allowed to flourish, God will act. And the people of God have a role in holding the various governments accountable to God's design. As the representatives of God here on earth we are to point the appointed leaders in the direction of God's requirements. This will include calling the powers that be toward a freedom of thought, conscience, and religion that allows humans to flourish, to become all that God intended.

How then are we to call the rulers of this world toward all that is of God and good? The starting point for all communication is that we want our message to be believed. For our message to be believed, we must be believed. And if we are to be believed by others we must be viewed as being knowledgeable, virtuous, and of goodwill.¹

To be viewed as knowledgeable: we must be across the facts surrounding the issue, we must be able to speak using the reasoning of the hearers, communicating in terms that connect with their worldview, and address all the aspects of the issue that are important to them. We must communicate with wisdom that is understood.

To be viewed as virtuous we must listen to and embrace others, offering them the same freedom of thought, conscience, and religion that we value, and actively model what we say or expect of others.

To be viewed as being of good will we must show and be understood to be on the side of all humanity. For example, we must demonstrate our willingness to value those of other cultures and faiths, being prepared to dialogue with gentleness and respect rather than dismiss and condemn. We must be ready to offer dignity to others. This may require that we give up our own rights and demands to first hear, value, and love the other as handcrafted by God.

Our public square voice must be one of wisdom, integrity, embrace, one of being for all humanity.

¹ Andrew Murray, *What Can the Church Say?: Politics and Religion in Contemporary Australia*, St Pauls Windows into ... Series (Strathfield, NSW: St Pauls Publications, 2005), 70.