

The European Evangelical Alliance's Socio-Political Approach

PREAMBLE

"We affirm that we must demonstrate God's love visibly by caring for those who are deprived of justice, dignity, food and shelter.

We affirm that the proclamation of God's Kingdom of justice and peace demands the denunciation of all injustice and oppression, both personal and structural; we will not shrink from this prophetic witness."
(Manila Manifesto affirmations 8 & 9)

We confess that we easily claim to love the Bible without loving the life it teaches – the life of costly practical obedience to God through Christ. Yet 'nothing commends the gospel more eloquently than a transformed life... We are charged to behave in a manner that is worthy of the gospel of Christ and even to 'adorn' it, enhancing its beauty by holy lives.'
(The Cape Town Confession of Faith, article 6-D)

EEA wholeheartedly supports these three affirmations, and paragraphs 5 & 13 of the Lausanne Covenant on "Christian Social Responsibility" and Freedom and Persecution" (see appendix1). EEA believes that there is no rivalry between evangelism and social responsibility. Any debate on this line reflects an unbiblical dualism between body and soul, life in this world and life in Heaven. Because Jesus preached and served, we are also called both to proclaim and to **be**



Good News. Words alone are not enough: and Jesus' command to "Love your neighbour" has immense socio-political implications.

The demonstration of God's character and values is central to Christian faith, hinting at Christ's Kingdom on earth and reflecting Christ the King. Christian people are called to point to Christ through actions which reflect Jesus deep concern for the whole person (body, mind and spirit) and for the whole human community.

Demonstrating God's character and being Christ's ambassadors are difficult tasks, impossible from a human viewpoint. We therefore acknowledge and confess our insufficiency to accomplish them and we count and rely on the sufficiency of Christ's grace and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. They are our supernatural resources.



We are called to perform this task not only as individual Christians depending on individual efforts, but as a body because Christ himself has chosen to have a visible presence on earth through the Church. It is through this visible body that He continues his work of reconciliation, justice and peace in this world today.

"For nearly fifty years CARE has been active in equipping Christians to engage with culture - in seeking to impact the political world; in helping the vulnerable through advocacy and care and in equipping Christians to exercise their democratic responsibilities. This has convinced us more than ever that we must do so with grace and truth, building relationships and earning credibility. Thus, we can seek to "take every thought captive for Christ." As Christians we believe that Jesus is Lord and an extension of our creation mandate is to engage as salt and light in the public square which includes politics.

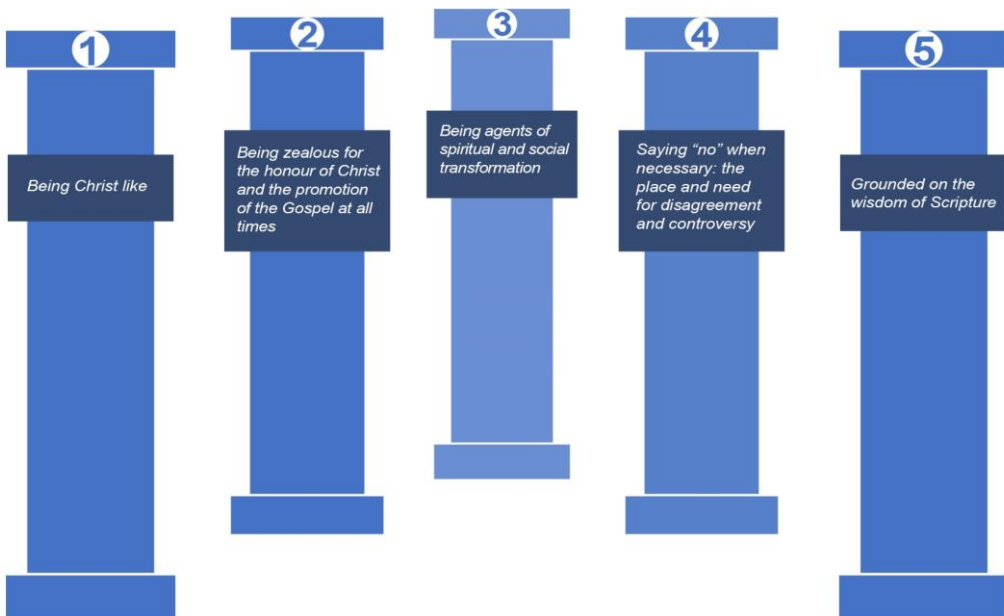
I therefore wholeheartedly approve of this document from the European Evangelical Alliance with its emphasis on a holistic, biblical worldview with no rivalry between evangelism and social responsibility and the importance of prayer and Scripture as we speak hope to society."

Nola Leach, CEO of CARE

THE PILLARS

EEA believes that Christian socio-political action should be deeply rooted in all of Scripture, with a special focus on the life and ministry of our Lord Jesus. When we look carefully to our Lord as a model, we find five pillars on which EEA wants to rest.

As we engage in socio-political action, we aim at accomplishing the following biblical principles:



*From the author, **Pablo Martinez, author, Bible teacher and psychiatrist:***

"As I wrote the paper, I was seeking to provide: A balanced and thoroughly biblical approach, having Christ as the central point of reference (Christ-centeredness is one of its main features). The purpose is to give a biblical basis and a practical guide to honour Christ and incarnate the Gospel at all times in the socio-political arena.



1 Being Christ like

"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus...and run the race marked out for us." (Hebrews 12:2)



Because Christ is the visible "image of the invisible God" (Col. 1.15), He becomes our supreme model in every area of life and calls us "to be conformed to the likeness of His Son" (Rom.8:29). Being in the public arena, we particularly need to imitate our Lord Jesus:

His total dependence on God through **prayer**. Prayer is crucial because Christ's enabling through prayer brings value to human effort. "Remain in me, and I will remain in you.....neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me (John 15:4-5) It is remarkable that whenever things got rough, Jesus went apart to pray (Lk: 5:15-16). Our renewal of vision and strength comes primarily from a personal relationship with Him.

His love that was unconditional and of wide breadth, without any discrimination. He loved the marginalised and even his enemies with the *agape* love that does not

require previous positive feelings. He loved regardless the outcome of this love; he always took the first step and he calls us also to take the initiative to love: "In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets (MT 7:12, The Golden Rule).

His mercy and compassion, not putting down grace and picking up wrath when talking about morality or relating to sinners. In all his relationships, even in controversy and disagreement, Jesus reflected grace, treating everyone with dignity. Jesus calls His followers to do likewise: "Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy" (Mt.5:7). Grace is one of the most distinctive features of the Christian community. All relationships with politicians should be to bless rather than 'use' them.

His justice and hatred of sin, conflict and oppression. In the Cross, God reveals both His love and His justice.

The Gospel is not only good news of love, but also of justice (Isaiah 42: 1,4,7; Lk. 4:17-19) “Blessed are those who thirst and hunger for righteousness” Jesus clearly said in one of the Beatitudes (Mt. 5: 6); but biblical righteousness is more than a private and personal matter, it includes social righteousness too as it is repeatedly stated in the law and the prophets: (Micah 6:8)


His purity in all areas of life including the tongue. Speaking the truth, rejecting all lie and slander (Mt.5:34,37), blessing and not cursing (Lk; 6:28), a strong rejection of any form of corruption (Lk.3:14) and hypocrisy (Mt. 6:16-18; Mt.23:23-36) were all hallmarks of His teaching and behaviour. “Blessed are the pure in heart because they will see God” (Mt. 5:8).

His servanthood. From his birth to his death, he had the spirit of a servant, rejecting all form of human power (Isaiah 42:1; Phil 2:7). The only time Jesus explicitly stated “*learn from me*”, he referred precisely to “being gentle and humble in heart” (Mt.11.28). This was the very summary he made of his character. His leadership and authority sprang from his servanthood, not from human strength or power (John 13:15-16)).

His courage is seen in his obedience to God’s will till the final consequences, a courage that led him to reject compromise when tempted by Satan (Mt. 4:1-11; Lk.23:36-39)) and to face the most cruel form of death. “...therefore have I set my face like flint” (Isaiah 50:7) and “he resolutely set out for Jerusalem” (Lk. 9:51; Phil.2:8)). We do not see the slightest sign of cowardice in Him.

“Jesus, anointed with the Holy Spirit and power, went around doing good and healing...because God was with him” (Acts 10:38). What an amazing summary!

Christlikeness in every circumstance is not an option, but a must: “I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you” (John 13:15). The disciples of Jesus must show the character of their Master. Jesus is the model for all people and at every stage of life regardless cultural context or type of ministry: “To this you were called... leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps” (1 Peter 2:21).



JESUS
LOVES
YOU!

2 Being zealous for the honour of Christ and the promotion of the Gospel at all times

“Father, I have brought you glory on earth...” (John 17:4)

“From Jerusalem all the way round to Illyricum I have filled every place with the Gospel of Christ.” (Rom 15:19)



In the same way that Jesus was concerned about the glory of the Father, also the glory of Christ must be our primary motivation (Ephes.1:12, 14). We should be “zealous” for the honour of his name (1 Cor.10:31; Acts 22:3). God’s determination and promise regarding the future glory of His son - “every knee shall bow, every tongue confess...to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:10-11)” - must be ours also. “The highest of all missionary motives is neither obedience to the Great Commission (important as that is), nor love for sinners.....but rather zeal -burning and passionate zeal for the glory of Jesus Christ.” (*John Stott The Message of Romans, The Bible speaks today series, IVP, Leicester, 1994, page 53*)

As we pursue this task we need:

Humility. Being aware of the “the plank in our own eye” (Mt.7:3)” prevents us from self-sufficiency and makes us fully dependent on the enabling of the Holy Spirit. Human beings can never speak fully and perfectly for Christ, because He is beyond any person’s full understanding. Christians sometimes risk damaging Christ’s reputation and the spread of the Good News by inappropriate political actions and words.

Clean motivations. We can discover hidden selfish motivations even in Christian service as Paul warns us:

“For everyone looks for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ” (Phil 2:21). Our anxious concern as we serve in the public arena must be the “interests” of Christ Jesus and not seeking our own glory. Jesus said of his own ministry: “He who speaks on his own does so to gain honour for himself, but he who works for the honour of the one who sent him is a man of truth” (Jn.7:18). With the psalmist, we need to pray “Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults.” (Psalm 19:12)

Joy. It is the joy that stems from doing the work of the Father and thus glorifying Him (John 17: 4). It is a joy that does not depend on our human victories (achievements) but on the firm conviction that Christ is the victor and He will one day rule over the whole Earth (Phil. 2:9-11)). It is a joy that delivers us from the stress of visible results or a sense of failure when we do not reach our goals. This joy makes our task not a burden to bear but a pleasure to enjoy.

We are called to “make the most of every opportunity” (Ephes.5:15-16) in the public arena, remembering that prayer is essential, so that “I may declare the Gospel fearlessly, as I should make.” (Ephes.6:19-20)

“A culture war mentality is increasingly present in Christian rhetoric and lobbying across Europe. A nostalgia for Christendom, combined with more aggressive secularism, can result in serious radicalization on both sides. In the long run, this will close many to the Gospel because of highly politicized Christianity. We must maintain a Christ-like approach to difficult issues like sexuality, religious freedom, Islam, abortion, bioethics etc., without mobilizing Christians and their wallets by exaggerating threats, stirring up fear, panic and feelings of being persecuted. The future credibility of European Christianity and its Good News message is at stake.

The European Evangelical Alliance based its socio-political approach on the belief that we can be radical and faithful to the whole of Scripture without being extremist, soft or theologically liberal and at the same time engage in unavoidable confrontations in a relational and respectful way. Even in Christian lobbying, a culture war approach has proven to be highly ineffective in the long run or with only a temporary influence on cultural direction.

European culture probably cannot be fundamentally changed by direct confrontation, but only by the effective provision of solutions and resources for Europe’s basic hopes, needs and questions. Whenever we enter the public space primarily to defend our own rights or privileges and not to serve the common good, we hide the Gospel and lose our focus on the salvation of individual people. Let’s continue to use the abundance of opportunities that we still have to share our hope in Christ.” **Jiri Unger, Czech Evangelical Alliance General Secretary.**



3 Being agents of spiritual and social transformation

"You shine like stars, blameless and pure...without fault in a crooked and depraved generation..." (Phil 2:15)



"Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in Heaven." (Mt.5:16)

We are not of the world, but we are sent into the world (Jn 17:16,18) with one clear purpose: **"to be salt and light"** (Mt 5:13-14). Salt prevents corruption, light illuminates and guides to truth. Social and spiritual transformation is the natural outcome of reflecting the character of Jesus in every area of life. This is how the first Christians "turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6, RSV). Being Christlike is a most powerful transforming force and becomes the best testimony we can ever give to the world." (Jn 13:34-35; Acts 4:13,).

EEA believes that only Jesus' return will herald the end of the battle against evil and allow the establishment of a perfect society. However, the EEA is convinced that God's people are called to be salt and light,

doing what they can to stop decay, expose injustice and, instead, bring flavour and hope to life.

Shining like stars –being light to the world- implies visibility; Jesus himself warns us of a common mistake: "a light is not to be hidden under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house" (Mt.5:15. We cannot hide from our social- public responsibilities because our call is not to isolate in a safe shelter just yearning for Jerusalem, but to thrive in Babylon.

In order to accomplish this, we need:

To build bridges: cultivate relationships. Jesus was relational (and so is the whole Trinity). He related to all kinds of people "in the

world” building strong relationships where grace, love, trust and faithfulness were paramount. Political engagement is best undertaken from a relational perspective.

To be radical and balanced at the same time. It is possible to be radical without being an extremist. Jesus was a radical because he went deep - to the “roots”- in every person and situation, yet he was always a paradigm of balance and self-control.

To be messengers of hope. Christians in the public arena have not always brought hope. The hope of the Gospel -a hope that is not utopia - is one of the most positive and distinctive contributions we can make in a frustrated -empty-and frustrating society.

We are aware that the Gospel is not simply a message of social amelioration; but the good news of salvation, incarnated by Jesus, has profound social implications. Jesus himself, quoting one of the prophetic Songs in Isaiah claims: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor,. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.” (Lk. 4:18-19).

These quotations of Jesus show us how our calling to be agents of spiritual and social transformation is strongly rooted also in the Old Testament. The teaching of the Law and the Prophets emphasizes the care for the poor and for the strangers (Lev.19:9,10,13,15; Deut.15:7-18;24:17), and shows great concern about family and social relationships, health, violence etc. Likewise, the frequent calls for justice and peace by the prophets, their outspoken claims against oppression and all forms of social sins, remind us of the socio-political dimensions of the whole of God’s word and work in this world.

We acknowledge, therefore, that the whole of Scripture is relevant to the whole of life (see in appendix 2 some examples of the many spheres in society where we can see this relevance of the Gospel today). The full life Jesus offers (Jn. 10:10) is applicable not only to our future in Heaven, but also to our present life.

The historical record demonstrates that social transformation by Christian influence has been a reality **in European society** through the centuries. The following are just a few samples -among hundreds- of the transforming power of the Gospel: Jan Amos Comenius, from 17th century Bohemia, for example, changed the way children were educated; Elizabeth Fry, from 19th century Britain was instrumental in changing the way prisoners were treated for ever; the work of Josephine Butler, also from 19th century Britain, led to laws to protect children from sexual exploitation and minimum rights for people working in prostitution; Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen, from 19th century Germany, provided cooperative banks for thousands of poor farmers; Groen van Prinsterer in Holland, combined his strong confidence in the truth of the gospel with a political career. He was one of the leading persons in the 'Réveil' in Western Europe 2nd half of the 19th century.

The Réveil was very influential in establishing the EA in different parts of Europe. Henri Dunant, well known as founder of the Red Cross, but who was also general secretary of the Evangelical Alliance in Switzerland. A remarkable case is William Wilberforce (1759-1833) who achieved the abolition of slavery in England. All of them left us a great example of the potential a Christian may have in the political arena.

The EEA thanks God for the countless Christian politicians, civil servants, journalists, educators, lobbyists, campaigners, businesspeople, doctors and others who seek to follow in their footsteps today.

"As a former Salvation Army Officer I say Hallelujah. This document is very much how I want to be working and our service be recognized by our brothers and sisters throughout the kingdom of God. Very, very helpful. May it encourage many others to get involved in this area!"

Frank Heinrich, Member of the German Bundestag.

NO

4 Saying “no” when necessary: the place and need for disagreement and controversy

“We want you to know, o king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold ...” (Daniel 3:18)



When we try to be Christlike in society, there will be situations where we need to set limits and say “no”. In such cases, disagreement and confrontation are not an option but a must. This is why we need to handle political differences and controversies in a distinctively Christlike manner. From Scripture we learn that:

Controversy is **not inherently wrong**. Jesus and the Apostles did not shrink from engaging in controversy when important issues of faith were involved. Matthew 15:1-20 is one example; Galatians 2:11-21 is another. At the same time, controversy has its dangers. The wrong sort of controversy is a poor witness to the world- 'See how those Christians hate one another!'

Controversy is **inevitable** when Christians engage in politics. We cannot separate faith and politics as some suggest, but they are uncomfortable partners and history reveals many examples. Not all of them were fought with words alone. If Christ is our first allegiance, confrontation will eventually occur: *“Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God.” (Acts 4:19)*

The **relational dimension** is crucial to handle controversy in the socio-political arena. If I disagree with an opponent, I should try to establish (or re-establish) a relationship with them so that I can see the issue about which we disagree from their perspective. Christ’s love, grace and humility should be paramount in any controversial relationship.

Use **temperate language** and avoid personal attacks on those with whom we disagree. God is “slow in anger”, we must be likewise. On the occasions when Jesus was controversial, his aim was not to defeat an opponent but to draw near and reach His neighbour. Persuasion and conviction are much better tools than aggressive defence of arguments. (see Paul in Acts 17:2,18:4; 26:28;28:23)

In any controversy, Jesus calls us to be **peacemakers**. Actually peace-making is part of the basic identity of his disciples: “Blessed are the peacemakers because they will be called sons of God” (Mt 5:9). We should aim at bringing peace in every situation and relationship “if it is possible and as far as it depends on us.” (Rom. 12:18).

In controversy, what is at stake is **not our personal viewpoints** but the **“defence, confirmation and progress of the Gospel”** (Phil 1:7,12,17). The bottom line has to be faithfulness to Christ. It is easy to think that what makes us angry is also offensive to him and our controversies thus become issues of faithfulness for us.

Christ's calling to proclaim and live the Gospel, to stand against injustice, to fight for freedom may bring forth all kinds of antagonism and persecution. The suffering Church is not a relic of past centuries, but a reality today even in several European countries linked or affiliated to EEA. Revelation 12 and 13 show us both how evil ideologies and ungodly political powers raise to oppress the Church, but also how *“our brothers...overcame the evil one by the blood of the Lamb and by the Word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.”* (Rev. 12: 10-11)



5 Grounded on the wisdom of Scripture

"I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore, be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves." (Mt. 10:16)



The teaching of Jesus was full of wisdom for everyday life. His whole life reflected the wisdom that springs from "the fear of the Lord" (Prov. 1:7). When He sent the twelve out to "the world", he gave them some practical instructions (Mt.10) that are helpful to us as we are also "sent out" to the public arena.

His advice to be *"as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves"* could be applied in the following areas:

Truth and Professionalism. Christian people base their political beliefs and aims on biblical truth, taking care not to use Scripture simply to confirm pre-formed political ideas. Christian people should base their political actions on political truth, never simply believing rumours or taking short cuts in monitoring and analysis. EEA does not expect politicians to listen because it represents millions of individuals and thousands of churches. It expects others to listen

when it has something relevant to contribute to the political debate and when these ideas are presented professionally.

Political Independence. Jesus was political but steered clear of political structures: "My Kingdom is not of this world" he clearly stated (Jn. 18:36). He never tried to influence the policies of Caesar or Pilate. He actively refused a political career: "Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again into the hills by himself" (John 6: 14-15). Christ's concerns transcend labels of "left" and "right". No political party is ever infallible. Individual Christians can, and probably should join political parties, being a positive influence within them. However, EEA believes that Churches and Evangelical Alliances should be independent of party politics and government, fulfilling a biblical and constitutional responsibility to participate in the

democratic process, seeking to persuade society that God's values are best for all.

Support from the Church.

Independence, however, does not mean individualism (as stated in the preamble). We firmly believe in the key value of **partnership** as we "*stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the Gospel*" (Phil 1:27). The Church has a proper and positive contribution in politics (it's not just about what it should not do) by teaching, promoting reconciliation and praying. It is the Church's task also to support and disciple its members who are involved in socio-political work. Above all, the Church should, not only preach unity, but embody unity. The unity of the Church is of paramount importance to fulfil our task. (John 17:21; 1 John 4:12).

Accountability. Entering the public arena as Christians is a difficult calling. A politically diverse accountability group is a helpful safeguard. EEA's socio-political team is accountable to the General Secretary and therefore, to all of EEA's members. Their work is also guided by the EEA's Public Policy Authorisation Team, whose membership is approved by the EEA's General Assembly.

APPENDIX 1

Lausanne Covenant para. 5 “We affirm that God is both the Creator and the Judge of all men. We therefore should share his concern for justice and reconciliation throughout human society and for the liberation of men from every kind of oppression. Because mankind is made in the image of God, every person, regardless of race, religion, colour, culture, class, sex or age, has an intrinsic dignity because of which he should be respected and served, not exploited. Here too we express penitence both for our neglect and for having sometimes regarded evangelism and social concern as mutually exclusive. Although reconciliation with man is not reconciliation with God, nor is social action evangelism, nor is political liberation salvation, nevertheless we affirm that evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty. For both are necessary expressions of our doctrines of God and man, our love for our neighbour and our obedience to Jesus Christ. The message of salvation implies also a message of judgment upon every form of alienation, oppression and discrimination, and we should not be afraid to denounce evil and injustice wherever they exist. When people receive Christ they are born again into his kingdom and must seek not only to exhibit but also to spread its righteousness in the midst of an unrighteous world. The salvation we claim should be transforming us in the totality of our personal and social responsibilities. Faith without works is dead.” (Acts 17:26, 31; Gen. 18:25; Isa. 1:17; Psa. 45:7; Gen. 1:26-27; Jas. 3:9; Lev. 19:28; Luke 6:27,35; Jas. 2:14-26; John 3:3,5; Matt. 5:20; 6:33; 2 Cor. 3:18; Jas. 2:20)

Para. 13 “it is the God-appointed duty of every government to secure conditions of peace, justice and liberty in which the church may obey God, serve the Lord Christ, and preach the gospel without interference. We therefore pray to the leaders of the nations and call upon them to guarantee freedom of thought and conscience, and freedom to practise and propagate religion in accordance with the will of God and as set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We also express our deep concern for all who have been unjustly imprisoned, and especially for our brethren who are suffering for their testimony to the Lord Jesus. We promise to pray and work for their freedom. At the same time, we refuse to be intimidated by their fate. God helping us, we too will seek to stand against injustice and to remain faithful to the Gospel, whatever the cost. We do not forget the warnings of Jesus that persecution is inevitable.” (1 Tim. 1:1-4; Acts 4:19; 5:29; Col 3:24; Heb. 13:1-3; Luke 4:18; Gal. 5:11; 6:12; Matt. 5:10-12; John 15:18-21)

APPENDIX 2

“Wherever the Christian Gospel has gone and triumphed it has brought in its wake new a new concern for education, a new willingness to listen to dissidents, new standards of impartiality in the administration of justice, a new stewardship of the natural environment, new attitudes to marriage and sex, a new respect for women and children, and a new compassionate resolve to relieve the poor, heal the sick, rehabilitate prisoners, and care for the aged and dying. Moreover, these new values become expressed, as Christian influence grows, not only in philanthropic enterprise but also in humane legislation.” John Stott, *I believe in preaching*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1982), p.166



“The European Evangelical Alliance socio-political approach is a well balanced document that expresses the role of Christians in society. It states very well how individual Christians should relate to the world but also how the European Evangelical Alliance should relate to its stakeholders and general publics. In fact, this approach is also a good example for any Christian organization.

The socio-political approach points out that EEA is not primarily dealing with churches but the whole of secular society. The document skillfully uses the authority of the Bible to back up its claims. It provides good tools for everybody in a nutshell. The document is a great help for all the members of the EEA to understand better their roles and mission but also for stakeholders to understand EEA.”
Peeter Vosu, International Secretary of the Estonian Christian Democratic Party, Evangelical Alliance of Estonia.

"For more than 30 years I have held different offices in the field of politics: assistant to an MP, director of a political think tank, MP, Minister and Deputy Prime-Minister. Taking public responsibility as a Christian is a challenge and a privilege. It is my experience that, in order to be salt and light, it is crucial to remain focused on Christ. Christian politics is not about Christians giving their opinions on political issues. Christian politics is - first and foremost - about confessing Christ in politics.

This document states the basic principles of Christian presence in the public domain in a very clear and powerful way. It is my wish that many Christians will be motivated by it to take up the challenge and become publicly and politically visible as followers of Jesus Christ.”
André Rouvoet, former Deputy Prime Minister of the Netherlands.