

A Biblical Basis for Supporting a Civil Public Square

“Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy” Hebrews 12: 14

The European Evangelical Alliance strongly supports the vision of a civil public square which is described in the [Global Charter of Conscience](#).

EEA encourages all Christians to work for & in a civil public square with freedom, space for the Gospel to thrive, respectful co-existence of different kinds of people & peaceful resolution of conflicts. It believes this is a thoroughly biblical duty for the following reasons.

I. THE FOUNDATION: GOD’S BLESSINGS TO HIS PEOPLE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN FOR THE WIDER GOOD

1. God’s own character: His great goodness & mercy are for all. (Psalms 145: 9, 15-16; Psalm 103: 8, 11). God created heaven & earth for all, He rules & cares for all & calls His children to bless all. He said all nations would be blessed through Abraham’s descendants. Joseph & Daniel are just two examples of obedient believers blessing pagan lands through serving with integrity in the public square.

2. Jesus Christ: the visible image of God’s mercy for all (John 1: 9). Jesus’ teaching, life & death became the most extraordinary, incarnated evidence of God’s mercy & goodness for all. He taught His followers to love their enemies & to work for freedom for those on the edge of society. Of course, Jesus’ behaviour & motivations within the public square were totally radical but He was there. He was the suffering servant, welcoming all, dying for all.

3. The Early Church & apostolic teaching: example & evidences in everyday life (Romans 12: 18). The Holy Spirit inspired the Early Church to reach out. Paul’s preaching was relational, building bridges with his audience. His letters urge

people to love & do good to all, including in civil life. They are called to shine like stars among a crooked generation (Phil 2: 14-15). They are to demonstrate the Kingdom as a foretaste of what is to come.

II. THE IMPLEMENTATION: GOD’S WILL IN RELATING TO MANKIND IS TO PROMOTE RESPECT FOR DIFFERENCE, TO RESPECT FREEDOM & DEMAND RESPONSIBILITY

1. Promoting a genuine respect for difference (Romans 15: 7). The Trinitarian God is Lord of all and calls all to repentance through Jesus. There is only one way to be saved. However, God also gave humans the choice to repent and follow Him or not. And He created diversity in all of creation and says that the diversity of human culture will be celebrated in the New Jerusalem. There is dignity in difference, stemming from uniqueness. Difference is an opportunity. But, of course, the fall means that difference brings danger. Christians need to know when to stand firm (E.g. Daniel 3 & 6). They seek common ground & yet always obey Christ. With open minds & hearts, they should relate to others as they are. They should seek to be peacemakers.

2. Respecting freedom and demanding responsibility (1 Samuel 8: 19-22). The advocacy of freedom for all cannot be separated from the notions of God's justice & human responsibility. Christians should not only advocate for freedom, but also for truth. They believe that trusting in Jesus is the only way to salvation. There is no coercion in witness but persuasion & an invitation to relationship. They are called to respect and defend freedom of others. In a civil public square, they can propose, proclaim, be an example & eventually confront our neighbours with God’s truth. The civil public square is worthy of defence but they always remember the responsibility to be heralds of God’s Gospel message of salvation.

III. A CHALLENGE: SOME PITFALLS TO AVOID

A narrow horizon: lack of a “wider embrace”. God’s people have often gone wrong in limiting God’s blessing to themselves & being only concerned for their own welfare.

The hidden lamp: lack of visibility. Christians cannot hide from their public responsibilities because their call is not to hide in a safe shelter just yearning for “Jerusalem”, but to thrive in and bless “Babylon”.

The temptation to try to make people be like them: lack of love & grace. Christ's command is to 'love your neighbour as yourself', not make your neighbour like yourself.

Imposing versus proposing: lack of respect for difference. Persuasion has its own limits, but it is God's method to relate to human beings. Jesus never attempted to force people to follow Him. Imposing Christianity and its values by means of force or by decrees usually brings forth rejection, nominalism & legalism, exactly the opposite of Christ's true freedom.

CONCLUSION

To have a prophetic impact, Christians must follow the example of the Servant of the Lord, who was a blessing for all (Isaiah: 49: 6). This great challenge implies example, proclamation, invitation, defence and confrontation in the civil public square. Such a great task is impossible to accomplish with human resources. The freedom revolution that Jesus ushered in is so radical that, without a moral steer from the Holy Spirit, the Scriptures and much prayer, it literally cannot be handled. EEA urges all Christians to pray earnestly for the Lord's help.