



# WHAT KIND OF SOCIETY?

VISION AND VOICE FOR THE UK CHURCH



A person wearing a red jacket is preparing a burger. They are holding a bun and a tomato slice. On the table in front of them are various condiments: a bottle of HP Sauce, a bottle of Bullseye mustard, and a bottle of BULLDOG beer. There is also a glass of beer and a burger on a plate. The background shows an outdoor setting with a table and chairs.


# INTRODUCTION

**Loving, free, just, and truthful. This is the Evangelical Alliance's vision for the kind of society we want to live in.**

We believe that the Christian faith can provide the foundations on which our nation can flourish. Evangelicals frequently say they want to change society for the better, so what might that look like?

Our goal with this little booklet, and its longer, more detailed sister publication (available at [eauk.org/wkos](http://eauk.org/wkos)), is to stimulate the next stage of the conversation, and to equip the church to practically cast a vision and be a voice for the good of all.

## A VOICE FOR GOOD

 We live among competing visions of what is good. There are some issues on which the evangelical Christian perspective is largely in line with contemporary public opinion, or has contributed to a shift in our collective response, for example tackling human trafficking or encouraging overseas development. But in other areas, such as abortion and sexuality, the perspective we offer diverges from the accepted norms in the UK today. Simply saying that we want to speak 'good news' to society is not enough.

It is necessary that we present a vision of what a society that reflects God's goodness could look like. Vision enables us to have a say in the world that we want our children and grandchildren to grow up in. There are significant challenges in our society and they will not be resolved by us stepping back, our response must be to speak out and work for good.

## LOVE, FREEDOM, JUSTICE, TRUTH

There can be a tendency among evangelical Christians to fall into one of two traps when it comes to social and political engagement. The first is to become absorbed into individual issues as the defining feature of our public engagement. The second is to say that things must change more broadly, but without doing the hard work to describe what those things are, and what that change could look like.

Our hope is that this document will plot a path between these two extremes and set out a vision for the kind of society we want to live in. We will neither prescribe policy details, nor resort to sweeping generalities which are hard to disagree with but harder still to do anything about. Instead, we work from four principles that are drawn closely from biblical ethics, but which wider society also benefits from and supports: love, freedom, justice and truth.

In each chapter we look at what the Bible says about the theme, the historic context and value of Christian involvement in this area, and where we are today. We then seek to look ahead and anticipate some of the challenges in the future and offer a vision for what a distinctly Christian understanding of love, freedom, justice and truth means for society.

**We seek to offer a vision for what a distinctly Christian understanding of love, freedom, justice and truth means for society.**

This is a public vision not a political one and each chapter will conclude with an outline of how we can respond, focusing on what can be done next.

In the centre of this booklet you will find case studies looking at how different groups are putting their faith into action in each of these areas.

We know we can have a better society than we do now, and we hope to provide a few steps on the path to getting there.

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**evangelical alliance**  
together making Jesus known



We are the largest and oldest body representing the UK's two million evangelical Christians. For more than 170 years, we have been bringing Christians together and helping them listen to, and be heard by, the government, media and society. We're here to connect people for a shared mission, whether it's celebrating the Bible, making a difference in our communities or lobbying the government for a better society. From Skye to Southampton, from Coleraine to Cardiff, we work across more than 80 denominations, nearly 4,000 churches, 600 organisations and thousands of individual members and supporters. And we're not just uniting Christians within the UK – we are a founding member of the World Evangelical Alliance, a global network of more than 600 million evangelical Christians. For more information, go to [www.eauk.org/join](http://www.eauk.org/join)

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# LOVE



*Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 1 John 4:8*

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At the foundation of the Christian story is love. Creation was an act of love, and the whole story of God's interaction with his people is a story of love.

## THE HISTORIC CONTEXT AND VALUE OF CHRISTIAN INVOLVEMENT

Love is a powerful motivator for Christian action. The love of God is what enables us to love both God and the world around us. Love motivated Elizabeth Fry to campaign on prison conditions and prominent evangelical Lord Shaftesbury to work for social reform.

Love is not soppy, it is active. Love acts.

## WHERE WE ARE TODAY

Over the past few years we have seen a rise in self-affirmation and a love of what we recognise and already know. In a way this is natural: the prospect of trying to love everyone and everything is daunting, so we retreat to a place that gives us comfort and reassurance. But this is not the kind of love that Christians are called to. As Heidi Baker has remarked: "It's not complicated. Love the one in front of you."

**"It's not complicated. Love the one in front of you."**

**Heidi Baker**

Love requires that we break down the barriers that push us apart.

## WHAT DO WE HAVE TO OFFER SOCIETY?

In a community love is not just an ideal but the glue that holds things together. Across communities and throughout society love is more than a flight of fancy, it's the thing that will ground and sustain our public life. We need to help our villages, towns and cities to rediscover the breadth of love, not just as a fleeting feeling or an expression of sexual desire, but love as affection and friendship and love as charity.<sup>1</sup>

There are no limits to how much we *should* love. We are only limited in how much we are *able* to love, because we will never do it perfectly, nor love all of the time. There will be occasions when we prioritise ourselves, or allow hatred or fear to crowd out love. Yet as we press in to the love we receive from God, his love will fuel our love both for him and for others.

## HOW CAN WE RESPOND?

We cannot truly love without knowing the one/s we love. For our society to be more loving we cannot act blindly trying to solve problems we do not know about; we must get our hands dirty and have our eyes opened. To love our neighbours we will have to get to know them.

When tragedy struck Grenfell Tower in June 2017, Latymer Community Church was ready and able to respond in love because they were there, right in the middle of the community, suffering alongside their neighbours.<sup>2</sup>

## ASK AND DISCUSS: WHAT DOES A MORE LOVING SOCIETY LOOK LIKE?

<sup>1</sup> CS Lewis, *The Four Loves* (London: Bles, 1960)

<sup>2</sup> See case study on p 8.





# FREEDOM



*It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.*

Galatians 5:1

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Freedom is God's ultimate gift to us, we are offered freedom from sin through Jesus, and the whole story of the Bible is a movement from slavery to freedom. Yet this freedom is exercised in the context of relationships, responsibilities, and even rules.

## THE HISTORIC CONTEXT AND VALUE OF CHRISTIAN INVOLVEMENT

Although theologians have long disagreed about the extent to which we are 'free' to choose Christ, all are agreed that we are not mere robots. In addition, we have a daily choice as to whether to acknowledge Christ's Lordship, or to follow our own impulses. The freedom to worship, or to rebel, is critical to giving that worship or rebellion meaning.

Religious freedoms are fundamental for all people, and are foundational to wider freedoms which are at the root of a plural and democratic society. Dating back to the Reformation, Christians have played a role in securing wide-ranging religious freedoms, both in the UK and much further afield.

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## WHERE WE ARE TODAY

Living in a democracy means that we agree to surrender some of our freedoms to the rule of law for the common good.

But freedom is also restricted in negative ways, preventing people from living the lives God has created them to live. Freedom from physical slavery remains of key concern to Evangelicals among many others. But we must also be concerned about people who are enslaved to debt, substance addictions and other burdens.



## WHAT DO WE HAVE TO OFFER SOCIETY?

The frequent secular charge is that religious beliefs are fine but they shouldn't affect what goes on in public life. Yet Christians believe that while the fullness of life comes through saving faith in Jesus, the whole world can benefit from the contribution Christians make to public life.

A plural public square requires robust freedom to say things that are challenging and uncomfortable, not for the sake of defending our own freedoms, but for the benefit of those we agree and disagree with. Furthermore, it requires that those freedoms are lived out in action, and that systems of law and government take account of the tension between competing beliefs and how in different situations different solutions will be required.

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## HOW CAN WE RESPOND?

First, we should use the freedom we have. If we don't, we will struggle to demonstrate why it is so valuable.<sup>3</sup>

Second, we should be agents of freedom, helping people both into the freedom available through life in Christ, and into freedom from debt, addiction and other oppressive circumstances.

Third we should advocate for freedom of religious belief, both for ourselves and for other religious groups. We must engage with the political system with grace and integrity, and as both commentators and participants.

Finally, we should use our freedom wisely. There are times when our freedom is best demonstrated by exercising restraint.



## ASK AND DISCUSS: WHAT DOES A FREER SOCIETY LOOK LIKE?

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<sup>3</sup> For further information on the scope of the freedoms we currently have, see our resource *Speak Up*, available at [greatcommission.co.uk/speakup](http://greatcommission.co.uk/speakup).

## LOVE IN ACTION – LATYMER COMMUNITY CHURCH



Latymer Community Church (LCC) sits at the foot of Grenfell Tower, scene of a devastating fire in June 2017. Many church members live on the estate, and as the fire raged the church community began to respond. LCC was opened in the early hours of the morning as a place of refuge, and stayed open throughout the day as volunteers and donations poured in. By the evening, LCC had taken on the responsibility for feeding those who still had nowhere to go.

The LCC team decided to put up a prayer wall where people could express their feelings, and gather to pray. Friends from London City Mission came to help, and as the group stood with their arms around each other on the streets, they were joined by other members of the community; people desperate for hope and ready to pray.



## FREEDOM IN ACTION – BETEL UK

**Kim's story:** "My parents were both alcoholics and the only thing my sisters and I saw at home was our parents being drunk or going missing. To numb the feelings of rejection I started drinking, smoking pot and taking LSD.



"I was so desperate for someone to want me. I got involved with a boy, but when I gained weight he said he didn't want me, so I started taking amphetamines to help me lose weight. That was the start of my downward spiral into deep addiction. When I was 18, my sister gave me heroin. I became a prostitute, a prolific shoplifter, constantly in and out of prison, on probation and drug treatment orders. Nothing worked. And then I came into contact with Betel.

"I came hoping to stay for two weeks to get off drugs. Fourteen years later, I'm still here! God has captured my heart and transformed my life. I lived without the Lord for so many years and now I can't imagine life without him. I was once trapped in addiction and darkness, but through Jesus, I now have a freedom I never knew was possible."

Learn more about how Betel helps bring long-term freedom and restoration to lives broken by drug and alcohol abuse at [betel.uk](http://betel.uk)



## JUSTICE IN ACTION – CHRISTIANS AGAINST POVERTY (CAP)



**Jayne's story:** "I wouldn't open my post; it just built up and built up in the kitchen, and even to just look at that pile of post was [gut-wrenching]. I was frightened about going to bed because I knew once the lights went off my brain would click into action and all my worries, my fears would come flooding in."

"[My CAP debt coach] Jane says I couldn't look at her for the first hour she was in my house. I gave her all my post and everything else and we went through it, and it was just such a relief. Such a relief. I think by the time Jane left I was an inch taller. She came back with my CAP plan. I knew I could do it – I just had that feeling."

Jayne began attending church, and after a few months called her debt coach to ask about "this Jesus thing". They talked for a while, and then "I did a salvation prayer and met with Jesus, and it's just been amazing."

"Confidence and pride - that's what CAP stands for for me." Jayne says. "That's something I can say with my hand on my heart, it really has given me back confidence and pride."

Jayne's story and others can be found on the CAP website: [capuk.org](http://capuk.org)

## TRUTH IN ACTION – ELECTION HUSTINGS



Election debates – known as hustings – are often held in local communities in the run-up to elections. Unlike carefully-orchestrated television debates, they are opportunities for members of the public to ask probing questions of the people who are seeking to represent us in parliament or other assemblies.

In 2014 Evangelical Alliance Scotland hosted hustings events in the seven cities of Scotland ahead of the vote on independence. These provided opportunities for people to ask representatives from the Yes and No campaigns about the kind of nation they wanted Scotland to become.

Talking with our potential representatives face to face is crucial, as we are then better able to judge whether they are telling the truth and whether or not they can be trusted with our votes. The local church, with its premises and personnel, is ideally placed to provide the forum for such public participation in the democratic process, and in the quest for truth in politics.



# JUSTICE



*And what does the Lord require of you?*

*To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. Micah 6:8*

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Justice is making things right, and the entire biblical story echoes God's overarching work of justice. God wants the people he created to return to a right relationship with him and to flourish throughout their lives. Throughout scripture God calls his people back to him, and instructs them to care for the vulnerable inside and outside their community.

## THE HISTORIC CONTEXT AND VALUE OF CHRISTIAN INVOLVEMENT

In the early church care for the poor and the vulnerable was what marked Christians out. As Rodney Stark has observed:

To cities filled with the homeless and the impoverished, Christianity offered charity as well as hope. To cities filled with newcomers and strangers, Christianity offered an immediate basis for attachments. ... And to cities faced with epidemics, fires, and earthquakes, Christianity offered effective nursing services.<sup>4</sup>

**“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”**

Martin Luther King Jr

In recent years the pursuit of justice has been reclaimed by evangelicals as a vital out-working of faith in action.



## WHERE WE ARE TODAY

There are people living on our streets, children leaving school without education, prisons which escalate crime rather than rehabilitate people, and global crises like that in Syria bringing refugees to our doorstep.

Without a coherent and accepted common account of what justice looks like, pursuing it can pull people in different directions. One temptation is to try to manage injustice by introducing new and wider-reaching laws. But while the law can curb some actions, it can't change the attitudes which underlie injustice. The state, individuals, the charity sector, neighbourhood groups, families and friends – all must work together in the pursuit of justice.



## WHAT DO WE HAVE TO OFFER SOCIETY?

At the peak of the creation narrative is humanity created in God's image. This gives immense weight to valuing people, their lives and their dignity in how we talk about them, how we report news, and how we structure society.

Justice requires that we ask whether a situation is how it should be, and if not, what are we going to do about it? Injustice is not simply caused by the pernicious and the maleficent, but by the inaction of those who could help.



## HOW CAN WE RESPOND?

Justice is never inevitable, it is always fought for, frequently contested, and easily sidelined. As individuals and Christian communities this means we need to be generous with our time, our money, and our compassion. Our commitment to justice must be visible as well as audible. We willingly pay taxes knowing that there are some aspects of justice that require the scale and authority of state action, but we also give independently to other causes and work to help on a personal and community level. We have to get our hands and feet involved in the challenging and messy work of justice.

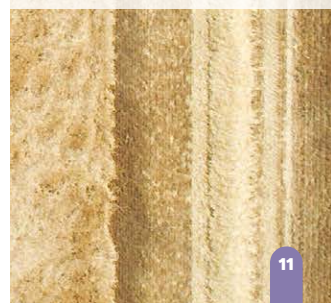


## ASK AND DISCUSS: WHAT DOES A MORE JUST SOCIETY LOOK LIKE?

4 Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (London: Harper One, 1997) p 161



**Injustice is not simply caused by the pernicious and the maleficent, but by the inaction of those who could help.**





# TRUTH



*All your words are true; all your righteous laws are eternal.* Psalm 119:160



## THE HISTORIC CONTEXT AND VALUE OF CHRISTIAN INVOLVEMENT

The common perception of Christians speaking truth in public life is of placard-waving protestors, or of MPs stating, 'The Bible says...!' in parliamentary debates. Yet our truth-speaking has for centuries had a much broader aspect than that.

Christians have long been a driving force in education, for example, because helping people discover and understand truth is a vital aspect of our witness in society. We long to see people equipped to find truth and understand the world that God has made, in all its complexity.



## WHERE WE ARE TODAY

The 20th century fostered a generation that believed truth could only be found in relation to observable and verifiable facts, everything else was subjective. That generation has passed. Increasingly, observable and verifiable facts are overruled by whatever one feels, knows, or decides is 'true'.

This subjectivity means we are inconsistent in how we handle truth. We maintain there are some actions which are unquestionably wrong, yet at the same time hold

that there is no place for absolutes. And into this mêlée we have the phenomenon of ‘post-truth’, and discussions about the role of emotions in influencing opinion.

## WHAT DO WE HAVE TO OFFER SOCIETY?

Christianity stands alone in its belief that truth comes not in a theoretical idea, or through how we feel, but in the person of Jesus Christ. Eternal truth came to earth and became known, enabling us to know God. It was in this act of love that truth was revealed and made accessible to all.

Truth is more complex than whether a statistic is accurate, an event real or a quote genuine. Christians are committed to truth because it provides the foundation of their life and faith. Trust in the knowledge of God and a belief in Jesus’ life, death and resurrection for our salvation focuses our actions and words, and being truthful is a matter of justice.

**Being truthful is a matter of justice.**

## HOW CAN WE RESPOND?

Our first response must be to live lives that are committed to the truth in which we believe. This means we have a clear commitment to the authority of the Bible to guide our faith and practice.

Second, we should make the most of our freedom to speak truth. We must share both the good news of salvation and the message that the Christian faith provides the foundation for true human flourishing.

**The truth we believe in is life changing, world transforming, good news.**

Our third response should be to work for truth in all areas of life, uncovering corruption and deceit and refusing to conform to practices and cultures that marginalise truth. We should live with integrity, and help create an environment that makes it possible for others to do likewise.

Finally, we have to show that the truth we believe in really is good news for all. Our words of truth must be backed up by actions, to demonstrate that the truth we believe in is life changing, world transforming, good news. It is public truth.

## ASK AND DISCUSS: WHAT DOES A MORE TRUTHFUL SOCIETY LOOK LIKE?





# CONCLUSION

*Where there is no vision, the people perish.* Proverbs 29:18 (KJV)

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Our aim in this resource is to help articulate a hopeful vision for the kind of society Christians want to see in the UK.

There is considerable work to be done in every part of society. In some areas this might lead to specific policy responses from government, but probably in many more it will require action from everyone rather than laws made by a few.

What can you do in your community to bring about the kind of society you want to see? How can you cast the vision to start the conversation? We may not be able to change our nations but we can make a difference to our neighbours. And a changed nation is made up of changed neighbourhoods.

**A changed nation is made up of changed neighbourhoods.**

Hope runs through our vision for society. We believe that things can be better. We believe that a vision of society grounded in Christian values is good for all, and we want Christians to have confidence in giving voice to that vision. We are not seeking a return to Christendom, but want a plural public space where we can live together and thrive, and we believe that Christianity provides the roots for the fruits that we all benefit from.

We want a society where the good news of Jesus is confidently spoken and widely heard, and where people have the freedom to accept or reject the message of hope and salvation. This is a risky business.

God gave people the freedom to accept or reject his love. He took a risk with us, and the society we want to see is a plural society where religious freedom leads to flourishing. Offering freedom means accepting the prospect that it will be rejected.

**While we hope that many will know the wonderful freedom, perfect justice, life-giving truth and unsurpassable love offered by God, we work for a society that reflects some of that now – for the good of all.**

We cannot fail to see the needs around us, but through our faith in a God who is greater than we can imagine, we have the motivation to respond to the challenges. There are many ways in which evangelical Christians are working to pursue love, freedom, justice and truth in our society. We've mentioned just a few throughout this report. We want to affirm this work, and we want to raise the bar by casting a vision and giving hope for a society transformed by values rooted in Christian teaching.

Our society can be more loving. It can be freer, more just, and more truthful.

This is a call for the Church to be a stronger voice for such a society, a society transformed by the teaching of Jesus.

And together we pray:

*Your Kingdom come, your will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.*





**READ:** take a look at the full *What kind of society?* resource at [eauk.org/wkos](http://eauk.org/wkos)



**DISCUSS:** take some time to discuss what this vision for society might look like in your community or workplace.



**DEVELOP:** from this starting point work out some specifics for what love, freedom, justice and truth might practically look like where you live and work.



**MEET:** take your ideas for a better society to those in leadership in your church, community, workplace, or any other area of life.



**SPEAK:** give voice to the vision for a society transformed by the goodness of the gospel, look out for opportunities to speak hope into the world around you.



**HEAR:** invite the Evangelical Alliance to speak at your church on the themes of love, justice, freedom and truth, and our vision for the kind of society we want. Email [info@eauk.org](mailto:info@eauk.org)

*"The biblical vision of our human calling to tend the earth and love our neighbours propels us into social concern for the societies in which we find ourselves. The church sends us into the world as agents of renewal."* **JAMES KA SMITH**