

Thoughts
on the
Westminster
Confession of
Faith

Prepared by the Gospel in Society Team
at the Presbyterian Church of Queensland
May 2014

Relevant Assembly Decisions

The 2013 PCQ Assembly moved to:

‘Endorse the Philosophy of Ministry adopted by the committee and encourage the committee to continue working in its current direction, including a more detailed report to the Commission of Assembly or to the 2014 Assembly in response to BB 2012, Minute 103, clauses 24-27 which read as follows:

24. *Note that in relation to the Confessional Statement concerning the Civil Magistrate, the Declaratory Statement states:*

6. *That with regard to the doctrine of the civil magistrate and his authority and duty in the sphere of religion, as taught in the subordinate standard the church holds that the Lord Jesus Christ is the only King and Head of the Church, “and Head over all things to the Church, which is His body.” It disclaims, accordingly, intolerant or persecuting principles and does not consider its office-bearers, in subscribing the Confession, as committed to any principles inconsistent with the liberty of conscience and the right of private judgement, declaring in the words of the Confession that “God alone is Lord of the conscience”.*

And that the Declaratory Statement makes no other substantive declarations in terms of the Civil Magistrate which could be held as a matter essential to the doctrine therein taught (DS, clause 5).

25. *Note that the WCF, chapter 31, clause 5, states*

V. *Synods and councils are to handle or conclude nothing but that which is ecclesiastical; and are not to intermeddle with civil affairs, which concern the commonwealth, unless by way of humble petition, in cases extraordinary; or by way of advice for satisfaction of conscience, if they be thereunto required by the civil magistrate.*

26. *Note that Chapter 7 of the GAA Code Declaration on the Spiritual Freedom of the Church also elaborates upon these matters.*

27. *Instruct its Committee on Public Questions and Communications to study the above clause 2, noting clauses 1 and 3 above, and bring to the next Assembly for its attention*

-
(a) *Guidelines on how the Assembly should deal with issues brought before it to ensure it is functioning in accordance with the Confession;*

(b) *Guidelines on how the Moderator, Clerk and the Convener of the Public Questions and Communications Committee should act in terms of producing statements in relation to Rule 5.13;*

(c) *Any advice the Public Questions and Communications Committee may wish to bring to the Assembly to enable the Confessional statement to be related to with more clarity.*

particularly with a view to providing the Convener, Moderator and Clerk with guidance in the light of the Confession as to how they should respond in terms of Rule 5.13.

Moderator & Public Issues

5.13 *The Moderator may speak on public issues on behalf of the Assembly only after the unanimous approval of the Moderator, the Clerk, and the Convener of the appropriate Committee.'*

The Philosophy of Ministry referred to above and adopted by the 2013 Assembly for the PCQ's committee on Public Questions reads as follows:

The two-fold purpose of The GiST ('Gospel in Society Today') team is to equip believers in PCQ congregations to a) live faithfully for Jesus in a secular society and b) engage in gospel-hearted apologetics that point to the great hope we have in Jesus. Our scope is limited to the areas of ethics, public policy and cultural engagement that impact significant numbers of Queenslanders. We believe the gospel of Jesus Christ should shape all areas of life, and therefore our approach is to provide engaging, accurate and winsome material that is informed by Evangelical, Reformed, Christ-centred theology and includes both implications for believers and principles of engagement with those not yet believing.

Introduction

In Australia the Christian church has little respect from the general community. Whatever real respect we once had is diminishing. This rather disdainful attitude toward the Church has been accompanied by a general ethical decline. The commands of God are rarely, if ever, referred to when issues of right and wrong are debated by the civil authorities, reflecting the general ambivalence of our community toward the church. Further, when a Christian denomination makes a declaration on an issue it rarely carries any weight with civil authorities.

This of course does not deter the denominations of the Christian Church, including PCQ, from speaking out. Along with various para-church organisations, denominations produce a steady stream of instruction and rebuke toward the civil authorities, peppered with the occasional note of encouragement. However, one cannot avoid the conclusion that the Christian church in Australia is increasingly ignored by the civil authorities and oversees a diminishing influence in the life and culture of everyday Australians.

One obvious solution to this problem would seem to be that Christians marshal their resources, both financial and human, and speak more stridently and frequently to the civil authorities. But should the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ do this? Is this the approach set out in the Bible? Or has the Church departed from our New Testament mission - adopting unbiblical, unhelpful and counter-productive attitudes to those God has placed in authority over us?

This document examines the question of how PCQ should be communicating with the civil authorities, in response to the request of both the 2012 and 2013 Assemblies. We begin by reflecting on the historical context of the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF). We briefly note our own historical context for the PCQ in 2014, before conducting a theological survey of the Old Testament, as it built anticipation for the Jewish Messiah. With particular reference to Israel we seek to sift clear points of *continuity* with the New Testament people of God from clear points of *discontinuity*, seeing as the filter the exaltation of Jesus Christ at the climax of the gospels and the whole Bible. The conclusion is that the Church should proclaim the gospel to all people - including those with civil authority - but to make specific comment on particular issues very rarely. This conclusion is also consistent with the GiST philosophy of ministry, adopted by the 2013 Assembly:

“The two-fold purpose of The GiST Team is to equip believers in PCQ congregations to a) live faithfully for Jesus in a secular society and b) engage in gospel-hearted apologetics that point to the great hope we have in Jesus.”

Historical Context of the WCF

Before looking at the Biblical evidence it is worth carefully noting the approach of the framers of the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF). In the midst of the Puritan era we might expect those who believe in a “Christian Commonwealth” to have advocated an approach where the Church is to be quick in decrying the shortcomings of civil administration. However, chapter 31 of the WCF enshrines a very different approach. In the fifth paragraph it says, “*Synods and councils are to handle or conclude nothing but that which is ecclesiastical: and are not to intermeddle with civil affairs which concern the commonwealth, unless by way of humble petition in cases extraordinary; or by way of advice for satisfaction of conscience, if they be thereunto required by the civil magistrate.*”

Rather than strident, frequent and provocative communication, the WCF advocates quite the opposite – limited and extraordinary, humble and conscientious, and as invited by the magistrate. The framers warn explicitly against meddling in the affairs of the commonwealth. The points being made in this chapter are clear: The State is unwelcome to interfere improperly with matters ecclesiastical; the church is not to ‘meddle’ in the proper government of the State.

It is our contention that the framers of the WCF are expressing in their own time and historical context, the New Testament teaching that the Church should speak sparingly and respectfully to the civil authorities. Further, that when PCQ addresses the civil authorities it should only, always and ever be done as an expression of gospel-hearted proclamation. We shall elaborate later on this contention and what it means for PCQ in the 21st century. For PCQ finds herself on mission for the gospel of Christ in the context of a secular (and increasingly secular), multicultural, post-enlightenment, post-romantic, post-industrial-revolution, post-colonial era, in an urbanised (and increasingly urban), increasingly mobile and increasingly transient population of Queenslanders, many of whom know next to nothing of the Bible yet want to know much more about Jesus Christ.

The Old Testament

In the beginning we see that God created humankind with a responsibility to govern and care for his world and the human community (Gen 1:28). Adam and Eve were stewards of the creation. Rulers over it. Bearers of God's image as those in authority. Michael Horton points out that this *cultural mandate* was given to the whole of humankind to "build cities and civilizations, farms and vineyards, houses and empires."¹ He goes on to say, "Every person, believer and unbeliever alike, receives a distinct vocation for his or her calling in the world, and the Spirit equips each person for these distinct callings in common grace."²

As the Old Testament story unfolds, we read of wise rulers who are equipped by God for their role - even though they are not a part of God's people. Examples include Abimelech in dealing with Abraham (Genesis 20:1-18 & 22:-34), Pharaoh in dealing with Joseph (various points in the Joseph narrative from Genesis 41 to 50) and Cyrus, who is even described as the Lord's shepherd (Isaiah 44:28). These pagan rulers, along with others, were fulfilling their responsibilities with a common grace understanding of right and wrong.

Alongside this *cultural mandate* comes the Great Commission in the form of promise that will have its fulfilment in the coming of Christ. Horton calls this the *cultic mandate*.³ After the fall, the gospel is announced in nascent form (Genesis 3:15). A seed of hope is planted. A promise is made by God very early in the story of humankind. Somewhere, at some point in the future, one of Eve's offspring will rise to destroy evil by reversing the curse.

With God's command to Abraham to leave all he knows to 'go', we see the seed of promise germinate: In Genesis chapters 12:1-3, 15 (especially verse 5), 17, and 22:17-18 we see God promising to make him the father not only of a great people, but of many nations. In contrast to the curse brought through Adam and Eve, through Abraham and his offspring all peoples on earth will one day be blessed.

When Israel is delivered from the Egypt and given the Law, the *cultic* and *cultural mandates* are united in the theocratic kingdom. Of course, in this great salvific event of the Old Testament, the God of Abraham becomes the God of the people of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob: Israel. Israel, as the people of God in the Old Testament, is constituted as a nation through her salvation from slavery to Egypt. In the remainder of the Pentateuch we see the task of the faithful people of God is to uphold this message of promise by being a covenant-keeping people, who live radically different lives to the peoples of pagan nations around them. The conquest narrative gives hope that there would be a restoration of a new Eden in the Promised Land, with the rescued people of God living in obedience to their creator. Yet in the face of Israel's persistent disobedience, the question of how the promises to Abraham will actually come to fruition becomes the tension of the whole story of the Old Testament.

¹ Horton, Michael [The Christian Faith](#), Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan (2011) p712.

² *Ibid*

³ *Ibid*

The expectation of hope becomes personified in II Samuel 7 has the promise of a king or a succession of kings. The way he is described makes it clear that there must be a king who will live and reign forever. Solomon, David's great son, starts with promise but becomes the opposite of the ideal King described in Deuteronomy 17. The succession of kings that follow are at various levels of failure and leave the faithful people yearning for the truly faithful king.

During this whole era there are numerous examples of prophets addressing the King in regard to his own conduct and the quality of his reign (see Deuteronomy 18:14ff). Nathan delivers the crushing rebuke to David regarding his adultery, cover-up and murder. Elijah challenges Ahab's idolatrous administration. Both Isaiah and Jeremiah have detailed messages of judgement for their Kings. Ultimately, led by her kings and despite God's prophets, Israel does not "drive the serpent from the garden, rule and subdue the nations occupying God's land, and establish righteousness in all the earth."³

The exile inevitably follows - that great catastrophe of the Old Testament - leading the people of God to lament God's judgement through the latter prophets. In prophetic statements there are messages of great judgement and in Jeremiah 31:31ff and Ezekiel 36:22-32, as two examples, there are messages of extraordinary hope.

At first sight it would appear that the promises of God had failed because the people and especially the kings had failed. However, the exodus and possession of the land ultimately are shown to be "only a shadow of the reality of salvation".

Very significantly for the purpose of this paper it should be noted that the prophetic messages to the kings of Israel are a call to faithfulness to their covenant responsibilities as the Lord's anointed king. They are a shadow of the reality of the coming king but are to foreshadow him by clear obedience to God. This is not the same situation of a modern government where the church is functioning.

When Israel lived under the reign of a foreign power we have the closest parallel to the modern church-state relationship. Clearly, men like Joseph under Pharaoh and Daniel in Babylon did not confuse their responsibilities under the cultural mandate with their responsibilities under the cultic mandate. They did not use their position to impose, for example, Sabbath keeping on these lands. When a prophetic address is made to a foreign nation it has the form found in Jonah. The message is of impending judgement with the specific or implied call to seek mercy from the Lord. Of course the Book of Jonah also serves as a powerful critique of the hard heart of Israel, for whom those outside their fold had become of no consequence and were not considered ones to whom the mercy of God should be proclaimed. In that sense the story of Jonah rebukes a modern church that only seeks to condemn ungodly authorities rather than evangelise them.

At the close of Malachi the Jewish people wonder at God's silence for 400 years, as they sing their Psalms and await the coming of the Messiah.

³ Horton p712.

The New Testament

The divine plan of restoration had its fulfilment in the coming of Christ to do what we could not do for ourselves because of our sinfulness. In his life, death and resurrection he has dealt with sin and provided a right relationship between his people and God. The people Jesus has called to himself have the task, not of moulding a civil administration, but of spreading the gospel of Christ's completed work as their collective responsibility. The church's role is spelled in the Great Commission of Matthew 28 and it lists the responsibilities of those who have been redeemed by the Lord Jesus. Apart from any cultural mandate role we may have, Jesus has called us to go and make disciples of all nations. When Jesus was asked about the establishment of his kingdom he echoed these words and told his disciples that they would be his witnesses (Acts 1). In both of these passages Jesus is making clear that in dealing with those outside the covenant Christians are to evangelise.

The very specific doctrinal teaching of the New Testament presents the civil authorities as having a distinct role from the church. The church is not told to interfere in civil matters but quite to the contrary is told to show respect and obedience to them. In Romans 13:1-5 the Apostle Paul spells out the believer's attitude to civil authorities. He makes that clear distinction between the role of the civil authorities and the role of church which is reflected in the WCF. He writes, "*Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience.*"

The same thoughts are echoed by Peter in 1 Peter 2:13-14 where he writes, "*Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.*"

Gregory E. Reynolds in a helpful article has pointed out that, "[Of importance] is the description of the civil ruler in this passage [Romans 13] as a promoter of good and an avenger of wrongdoing. This is a fact—all verbs being in the indicative mood—not a standard to which the ruler is commanded to aspire. All of the imperatives are directed to the church. The letter itself is written to the church in Rome. Paul's concern is that they understand the secular state, not as the Jews did, as an enemy of the true religion, but as a providential provision of God to keep order in the world in which the church is called to proclaim her message."⁴

⁴ Gregory E. Reynolds, *What is the State For?*, retrieved online, http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=47&issue_id=21

The objective of Paul in Romans 13 and Peter in 1 Peter 2 is that Christians would respect the fact that God has given authority to civil rulers. These rulers may or may not provide laws that comply with Christian morality. It is often noted that Romans 13 was written during the reign of the infamous Nero, who certainly had no concern with the Lord Jesus Christ and the God of Israel - yet respect and submission were still required by Paul.

The civil authorities will however be providing a civil order in which the church is able to function in its task of gathering the lost into the Christ's Kingdom through the proclamation of the gospel. The church does not have the role of being the moral policeman for the community and does not have the role of urging the civil authorities to do that either. Areas of moral controversy are best seen as an opportunity for the Church to proclaim Christ. As expressed in the GiST paper on the Gospel, "When Christians speak to our community [including civil authorities] in areas of contemporary ethics, public policy and cultural engagement, there is only limited value in presenting the norms of God's word, however specific the application may be, without the gospel. Change is always needed and for true change the gospel is essential. Otherwise it will only be a reminder to a lost world of its deadness, enslavement and condemnation."

A brief survey of the historical narratives of the New Testament shows a number of encounters between God's people and civil authorities. Each of these shows a consistency with the church following the task of proclaiming Christ and not seeking to interfere with civil government.

The first in the gospels is John the Baptist, rebuking Herod for his inappropriate marriage. This is a continuation of the Old Testament pattern of the prophet calling the one who considered himself king to covenant fidelity. There is no parallel in this to Christians talking to civil government.

When Jesus was asked about paying taxes to the Romans he gave his famous response that his hearers should "give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God". There is a great deal to learn from his words – Jesus is not simply showing no inclination to meddle in civil affairs in the question of tax, he's making a grand claim that while Caesar is responsible for his limited political realm and coins which bear *his* image, God has a claim over that which bears *his* image – that is, *all people* (Gen 1:28). This view of Jesus' approach to civil authority is also reinforced when he was on trial before Pilate. Jesus clearly pointed out to Pilate that he only had authority because God gave it to him but he also made it clear that he was not interfering with this authority and that his own was of a different order.

In the book of Acts most encounters with authorities are with the Jewish religious leaders and invariably remind them of the calling from Christ to preach the gospel. Later in Acts when dealing with Roman civil leaders, which is closest in point to Christians dealing with modern leaders, there are *three* relevant features.

First, Christians (Paul in each instance) make it clear to the authorities that they should obey their own laws and not misuse their authority to stifle the spread of the gospel (Acts 16 & 22).

Second, Christians were happy to use the civil authority to create order (Acts 21).

Third, Christians proactively sought out opportunities to address civil leaders, and used these opportunities – even those presented by the legal system - to bear witness to Christ (Paul seems determined not just to get to Rome, but to preach to Caesar).

The conclusion from these points is that the task of Christians is to preach the Gospel of Jesus to whole world despite setbacks and even hostility from various sources, including the civil authorities.

While there is limited material in the gospels and Acts, it is accurate to say that there is no incident of the Church (or Christ) acting so as to “intermeddle with civil affairs.” The actions of the New Testament Church were consistent with the command of the Lord Jesus, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8) The Book of Acts finishes with the comment that while the Apostle is a prisoner of the Roman authorities, in utter physical subjection to them, he was “proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus with all boldness and *without hindrance*.” (Acts 28:31). Ultimately then, we see that civil authorities, no matter how repressive, cannot in God’s economy hinder the bold proclamation of his kingdom.

Implications for the Church

The Old Testament shows us that any attempt by the Christians to replicate the nation of Israel as a civil administration will not only fail because of sin but will muddy the waters of understanding where their history was leading; namely to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Horton also makes the significant point that that when dealing with civil authorities beyond the theocratic kingdom, which is the closest parallel to the Church and State, the people of Israel clearly saw a distinction between the two mandates and did not seek to impose the Law of God on them. This has important implications for Christians in a secular liberal democracy. He says, “Like Joseph and Daniel, who held positions of secular leadership during periods of exile, some believers may become rulers of state and leaders in many other cultural labours. Nevertheless, like Joseph and Daniel, they are not to confuse their cultural mandate (which they share with unbelievers) and their evangelical mandate to spread God’s kingdom. While refusing to accommodate their faith and practice to the idolatry of the nations they serve, such leaders also do not seek to advance and expand God’s kingdom by means of the powers that they are given as secular rulers.”⁵ The implication is clear regarding the responsibilities of the State and the Church. The Church spreads the gospel and Christians live alongside their unbelieving comrades in the role of the cultural mandate

⁵ Horton p713.

Similarly care must be taken in using the Old Testament prophetic ministry as a model for the Church addressing civil leaders. There are important perspectives that should be carefully noted. Firstly, the prophetic ministry calls the King and the nation back to fidelity to the covenant which the Lord established with them. It is simply muddled thinking to draw a parallel between that activity and an address to a civil authority which has no such relationship with God. Secondly, among the later prophets the situation has moved beyond such a simple call to one of highlighting Israel's incapacity for true repentance and the first hints that Israel was serving as a foreshadowing of the true kingdom to be established by Jesus Christ.

Graeme Goldsworthy points out that, "While it is important to observe how the prophets bring charges of Israel's disloyalty to the covenant, this is not their main significance for us. The implications of the covenant for social justice, fidelity to marriage, honesty, compassion for the poor and dispossessed, and sincerity in worship of God are constantly set before us by the prophets. But addressing the ills of our present society in the name of Christianity does not necessarily make our message 'prophetic'."⁶ The prophetic role was to direct the people to a hope that at that stage was yet to come, the Lord Jesus Christ. This prophetic role has its equivalent in our age in the task of God's people calling the sinful world to Christ and not merely to moral refurbishment.

In addition, the various oracles to the nations, as well as particular prophetic ministries that have their focus outside of Israel have two forms. The messages are either straight condemnation or a call to repentance and reconciliation with the Lord. Jonah serves as a simple example of the former with the latter being implied.

The conclusion is that a prophetic ministry as practiced in the Old Testament is a call to genuine faithfulness from the people of God. It also embraces a message to the outside world that assures them of God's impending judgement with a specific or implied call to seek mercy from him.

While the example of the post-New Testament early church is not an authority for us, there are some parallels between the political context in the 2nd and 3rd centuries and our political context, as outlined above. The approaches Christians like Tertullian and Justin Martyr made to ruling authorities engaged substantially with political issues and made comment about the social contribution of Christians - but this was always framed by the clear proclamation of the Gospel in the hope that those who read their submissions would come to know Jesus.

In a lengthy explanation of the Christian message in his *Apology*, Tertullian, writing to the Roman authorities, said: "Inform yourselves carefully, therefore, whether the divinity of Christ is not the true divinity you ought to worship, and which, if once entertained, new makes the old man, and forms him to every virtue, and consequently all divinities but Christ ought to be renounced as false."⁷

⁶ Goldsworthy, Graeme, *According to Plan* (IVP, Leicester (1991) pp 238,239

⁷ Tertullian, *Apology*, Chapter XXI, retrieved online http://www.tertullian.org/articles/reeve_apology.htm

This model of proclaiming the Gospel in the context of our interactions with the government is consistent with the model adopted by the early church, and necessary in a society that is either uninformed about, or even hostile to, the Christian message.

The Exceptions in WCF

The WCF does allow that in “cases extraordinary” the church may make representation to the civil authorities by way of “humble petition”. How it can be discerned what is an extraordinary case is a matter of prayerful wisdom but the terminology and the differing roles of the church and civil leaders would suggest that it be a rare event. The most obvious examples would be to save lives and where Christians are being required by government decree to sin. In Acts the Apostle Paul is content to make application through his nephew to Roman tribune to save his own life (Acts 23). A decree that requires Christians to sin is a matter that has numerous examples of God’s people defying authorities (Daniel 3 et al) but in a liberal democracy there are other avenues before that drastic step that can be taken.

The WCF also says that the church can respond to the civil authorities when asked on a specific issue. This occurs from time to time as the government may ask for submissions on a particular matter. It is tempting to see this as the opportunity for Christians to present a demand that the authorities comply with Christian morality. That may be the case but in the light of the pattern of prophetic and apostolic proclamation it would be wrong to present that alone. As expressed in the GiST Gospel Paper, “The Church has the responsibility of making disciples among all peoples and in every sphere”

It could be thought that including the gospel is not suitable if making submissions to the government or similar institutions. However, in the New Testament and particularly in the Book of Acts we see God’s servants often interacting with the leaders of the community. Inevitably, their message was the gospel.” Whatever the issue may be, the church must be very careful not to depart from its God given task of gospel proclamation.

Implications for individual Believers

This of course does not preclude individual Christians from being fully involved in the life of the community, and exercising appropriate Christian influence in their vocation. This includes in areas of civil administration. Christians are called to be salt and light in this fallen world and therefore are always to be an influence for good. The simple instruction of Jeremiah to the exiles in Babylon serves as a good pattern of life, “*Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.*” (Jeremiah 29:7) So too 1 Peter 3:1, “*But in your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.*”

Christians will be able to do this best when fully informed on the standards of right and wrong as set out in the Bible and how they apply to some of the hard or controversial issues. However, even individual Christians must always remember that the Lord has called us to be witnesses to his saving work so that the influence, while it may cause people to change their attitude on moral issues, is ultimately to direct people to our saviour.

We must also remember Paul's instructions about our approach to those in authority in recognition that God is ultimately in control (1 Timothy 2:1-4): *"I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."*

Conclusion

In conclusion, the responsibility of the church is to proclaim the Gospel to the world, including rulers and authorities, making the most of every opportunity. It is appropriate for the church to deal with civil affairs, but this occurs as we pray for, and proclaim the Gospel to, those in authority. It does not mean "intermeddling" or seeking to wield political power on every political issue. When the civil authorities ask for input the Church must not abdicate its primary role and any advice must be given in the context of gospel proclamation.

Nothing in the above, however, precludes Christians as citizens of the nation from participating fully in the political and moral debates of the times.

All of this is summarised in the GiST philosophy of ministry:

"The two-fold purpose of The GiST is to equip believers in PCQ congregations to a) live faithfully for Jesus in a secular society and b) engage in gospel-hearted apologetics that point to the great hope we have in Jesus. Our scope as The GiST is limited to the areas of ethics, public policy and cultural engagement that impact significant numbers of Queenslanders. We believe the gospel of Jesus Christ should shape all areas of life, and therefore our approach as The GiST team is to provide engaging, accurate and winsome material that is informed by Evangelical, Reformed, Christ-centred theology and includes both implications for believers and principles of engagement with those not yet believing."