

Pursuing peace, pursuing justice

The core values of
Christian politics

FICDD
Foundation for
International Christian
Democratic Development

ChristenUnie

ecpm
European Christian Political Movement

Serving as politicians with Biblical values as our starting point: there have been Christian political parties in the Netherlands for almost 150 years that see God's word as fundamental to how they operate.

This statement of principles from the Christian Union (ChristenUnie in Dutch) explains why we believe in a politics that is founded on God's word. It also sets out our political vision on Dutch society and the ways in which we might serve people, share freedom and protect life. This declaration reflects the vision of the Christian Union within the context of the Netherlands and Dutch history and the political culture of our country have of course played a role in its compilation.

The European Christian Political Movement (ECPM) recognises the value of this document as a potential source of inspiration for sister parties and organisations. We hope therefore that this translation into English will both stimulate and serve you. As brothers and sisters, we can always learn a great deal from each other and it is good to inspire one another in the political arena too. Based on Scripture and the words of old and new Christian thinkers and politicians, this declaration makes clear how we would like our society to look. We hope that you will find it inspiring and that the contents will have a positive impact within the cultural and political context of sister parties and organisations outside the Netherlands. To God be the glory!

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Some two thousand years ago Jesus visited Nazareth, the town where He had been raised as a carpenter's son. On the Sabbath day He attended synagogue and sat down among the people. When it was time for a reading from the sacred books, Jesus stood up, took the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and read the following:

*God's Spirit is on me;
he's chosen me to preach the Message of good news
to the poor,
Sent me to announce pardon to prisoners and
recovery of sight to the blind,
To set the burdened and battered free,
to announce, "This is God's year to act!"*

Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. Then He spoke again, saying,

"You've just heard Scripture make history. It came true just now in this place."

Christians believe that Jesus is the chosen one, the Christ. He proclaimed the good news of God's Kingdom: a promise for the future, but also a reality in the here and now. He came not to wield earthly power, but to give strength to and build up the weak. And that is how He reigns in this world. It is only in Jesus that people really find peace.

Jesus calls on everyone to seek peace and justice by following Him. This quest extends not only to our fellow human beings but also to society and politics, where decisions are taken on

Luke 4:14-21

Isaiah 61:1-2

*Apostles' Creed (170)
Nicene Creed (381)*

behalf of that society. This is why many Christians are active in politics and why Christian political parties have been formed. This document looks at three important ways in which the

Christian faith can be translated into politics:

- our view of society and government,
- our core political values,
- our political stance.

Living in relationships

A vision for society and the role of the authorities

A good life is one lived in relationships, and this is the underlying motivation at the heart of Christian politics. We are called to live in relationship with the Creator, with creation and with one another.

Just as God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – is relational in Himself, so too man – created in God’s image – is a relational being. Each individual human being is a unique person. However, while an authentic and free life has tremendous value, we do not tend to live well as isolated individuals. Relationships are more than just a matter of free will or entering into a contract – connectivity and interdependence are features of our lived reality.

We are dependent on the God who created us. Life is not a coincidence. Truth is not a subjective matter. Life has its origin and final destination in God and His Word is true. It speaks eloquently into our lives and our society, and resonates in our consciences. We are able to give to others because God has given to us. All earthly authority stands under His authority and His justice.

We are dependent on God’s creation. Regardless of how much people may dream of a manageable world, our role is only relative. We are powerless in the face of natural disasters. Regardless of how advanced our technology becomes, it is not people who give nature its amazing balance. We live by the oxygen in the air, the water that quenches our thirst, the ground beneath our feet and the food that the earth produces. We thrive best when we take good care of what God has given us.

At the same time, we are dependent on one another at every stage of our lives, from the moment of birth to the end of our days. We need each other to exist and move forward. We flourish by living life together, not in empty individualism.

Fortunately, our world and this age are blessed with a great deal of connectivity. Every day, people enjoy the fruits of God’s creation. Cooperation, entrepreneurship and technological inventions have brought significant benefits to mankind. Many people live together in freedom and peace, and many others all over the world strive for justice.

Nonetheless, our world is by no means perfect and often strays far from God’s intentions. Many have turned their back on their Creator and pinned their hopes on themselves. We insist on having our own way and lording it over others, descending into and becoming trapped by selfishness and greed.

Our actions are threatening the climate and the quality of life on earth. The lust for power and a seemingly insatiable desire for ‘more’ is having a negative effect on equality of opportunity. Instability, insecurity, terrorism and hatred are all too common and many people are forced to leave their homes. Individualisation places a burden on relationships, families and communities, and polarisation and tension are on the rise in many societies.

Stewardship

Genesis 2:15

The common good

*‘Bonum commune’
Mater et magistra (1961)*

*1 Corinthians 12:12-30
Martin Buber, Ich und Du (1923)*

*Emmanuel Levinas,
Totalité et Infini (1961)*

Brokenness

*Romans 8:15
Aurelius Augustine,
De Civitate Dei (426)
G. Groen van
Prinsterer, Unbelief
and Revolution (1847)*

Justice

*Jeremiah 29:7
Declaration of Lausanne
(1974) art. 5*

Taking responsibility

*'Sphere sovereignty'
Abraham Kuyper (1880)*

The role of government

Romans 13:1-4

Subsidiarity

*Rerum novarum (1891)
Quadragesimo anno
(1931)*

Pacem in terris (1963)

Constitutional democracy

It is to this broken world that we are all called to bring peace and justice. Pursuing justice requires us to actively work for a dignified human existence for others. Seeking peace means constantly supporting reconciliation in a world mired in conflicts.

Different social networks have different responsibilities when it comes to answering the call for justice and peace. Faith communities have a different calling from families, schools from businesses. These different social networks complement each other and are mutually dependent. Society as a whole always benefits when these relationships blossom.

Government has a responsibility too – to protect justice and oppose injustice. As guardians of social order and the interests of the community, they are called to protect all that is vulnerable, from people to the environment.

Government should not take away responsibility from other social relationships. They should protect the space those relationships need in order to succeed, and support them in doing so.

In a democracy governed by the rule of law, there are limitations to power imposed by the law and there is political opposition and accountability. Legislative power and executive power are separate. The law is independent. All citizens are equal before the law.

In a democracy we are all invited to help shape society on the basis of our values and convictions. To this end, citizens elect representatives who are called to work for justice in good faith. A successful democracy requires commitment from both elected representatives and citizens, and these efforts need to be constantly renewed.

We sometimes see distrust of and cynicism towards those in power, with good reason at times as people abuse that power. However, even though power often becomes an end in itself, this is no reason to turn our backs on the whole idea. In essence power revolves around taking responsibility, and we are called to make power subservient to justice.

Over the centuries Christians have been among those willing to respond to the call to justice via prayer, work and perseverance during times of hardship. The Christian faith has had a considerable influence on the development of society, democracy and the rule of law in throughout the world. It is only right then that Christians continue to play a constructive role, serving the Lord by seeking peace and pursuing justice.

Serving society

Core values of Christian politics (1)

We are called to serve our neighbour, not as an abstract ideal but in concrete relationships and communities.

The call to service applies to all of us in the wide variety of relationships into which we can enter in this life: relationships of love and faithfulness, family ties or friendships, within communities of faith, neighbourhoods and the workplace. Commitment to these relationships is a matter of personal responsibility. The role of government is to protect the space in which these relationships can be maintained.

Our society did not appear out of the blue. Everyone was once a child, born of a father and a mother. Each of us is a link in a chain of human relationships that connects the generations: a chain that dates back to the beginning of history.

Servant leadership

*Proverbs 14:34
Thomas Aquinas,
De regimine principum
(1267).*

Christian politics

Serving through relationships

*Johannes Althusius,
Politica (1603)*

Marriage

Genesis 2:24
Mark 10:2-9

God instituted marriage at the outset and this public commitment between husband and wife has a unique value. Government should recognise and protect marriage in accordance with its origin and significance, while also looking out for those who are not, or no longer, married.

Relatives and family

Families and relatives give meaning to our existence; they are the foundation of our personal development and contribute to the resilience of society as a whole. Brokenness comes painfully close to home when these relationships break down. Governments are called to protect and organise the space for family life in such cases, safeguarding children with policies that take account of parental responsibility.

Social policy

Not everyone starts from a position that is conducive to participation in society, and government is called to protect everyone's opportunity to play their part.

Government should also guard against unrestrained interference and intervention, which is a threat to the individual accountability of people and social groups. It should respect the diversity of society and everyone's personal responsibility.

Integration

Newcomers to a country are also called to play their part in society. Government should therefore actively tackle discrimination, supporting and monitoring the integration of newcomers to society, both socio-economically and in the field of values.

Moral markets

Caritas in veritate (2009)

Government creates the conditions for a functioning market. A good market should not revolve solely around growth and the quest for more. Nor should it be based on the maximum exploitation of workers. A good market ensures that people are able to flourish, that labour and capital are not opposing forces, and that entrepreneurs, employers and employees can all benefit from each other's talents. In the economy, attention

needs to be paid to the burden of debt and the importance of recovery. Government should facilitate the market to attain its goals, acting in a supervisory capacity when the market starts to dominate society or market forces misuse their power.

Our society and economy work best when there are quiet moments too. The biblical principle of a day of rest has social significance: no one benefits from working twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Collective rest is vital for family life and sense of community.

International cooperation also requires good relationships. A shared history, culture, and norms and values are also important. Christians feel a connection with fellow believers all over the world. And there is a bond with Israel and its people, the land of God's first covenant.

International cooperation and friendship can never be separate from justice. In fact, justice and peace are the higher purpose of this cooperation. In an international context too, attention needs to be paid to people and communities in a vulnerable or minority situation.

International cooperation does not have to be tied to ever greater market forces. A global market in particular needs to be ordered and limited, which requires cooperation between governments around the world. Government should advocate fair trade so that all nations can flourish.

International cooperation should not revolve around increasing the concentration of power and nor should it weaken national sovereignty. Its success relies on the approval of national populations and democratic legitimacy. Although national, provincial and local communities are not final and absolute entities, we should accept them gratefully as limited spaces where we can work in concrete ways for peace and justice.

**Sunday:
a day of rest**

**International
cooperation**

**International
justice**

**Multinational
markets**

**National
sovereignty**

Sharing freedom

Core values of Christian politics (2)

People have been given the freedom to make choices in life based upon their deeply-held beliefs and convictions. We are called to enable others to share in this freedom.

Freedom was not given to us so that we can harm others or restrict their freedom. Freedom comes with responsibilities and we have been granted it in order to build each other up.

Government is impartial, making no distinction between people and fighting discrimination on the basis of religious or ideological belief, political conviction, race, gender or sexual orientation. It takes appropriate action when people are persecuted for their personal identity.

People have a right to their private lives. Our privacy is under threat in the digital era with international forces treating intimate information as an object of trade and manipulation. Government protects citizens by protecting their privacy.

People have the right to form communities and organisations with shared beliefs on how to live. The majority in society are called to protect the freedom of minorities. Every individual has the right to leave a community and there is no place for coercion in a democratic state.

We believe that people cannot and should not be forced by the authorities to believe in God and love their neighbour – these are matters of the heart. In a democratic state, everyone should be free to practise their religion or belief, individually or in fellowship with others. All are free to express their faith or belief in their life and work. Parents are free to let their

faith and belief influence the upbringing of their children and education at school.

Religious communities and governing authorities have a calling and a responsibility of their own. The church does not have direct influence on government, nor does government have direct authority over the church. This does not mean that church and state are completely separate: both have a part to play in public life. Churches and other religious institutions are essential for people. They are a source of moral capital for society and deserving of protection.

Government is impartial, but not neutral. Anyone seeking to curtail evil has to know what is good. Our leaders must also be moral leaders, calling justice justice and injustice injustice, and setting a good example. Moral leadership also requires honesty – recognition that not everything in this broken world can be managed and that the scope of politics is limited.

Government should respond firmly when freedom is under threat. Those who actively seek to deny freedom should be actively opposed. In the fight against injustice and oppression, however, we should never resort to injustice and oppression ourselves. The best defence of democracy is upholding public morality.

*Galatians 5:13-14
1 Peter 2:16*

Impartiality

Privacy

Freedom of association

Freedom of religion

*Dignitatis humanae (1965)
Declaration of Lausanne (1974) art. 13
Deus caritas est (2006)*

Church and state

*Matthew 22:17-21
Martin Luther, Von weltlicher Obrigkeit (1523)
John Calvin, Institutio Christianae Religionis (1536)*

Moral guidance

Defending democracy

Protecting life

Core values of Christian politics (3)

We are all part of one creation and one humanity. We flourish if we live a life of gratitude and unity.

Look at the birds of the air, they do not sow or reap – it is God who feeds them. The creation is His work. Its existence and finiteness are in His hands. The Creator provides a sufficiency and we should enjoy what we have and share with others so that no one misses out.

That said, our world is marked by a hunger for more and more. We produce and consume as if it is only our own lives and wealth that matter. Humans are endangering the balance of nature, depleting sources of water and food, and polluting the planet. Millions are already feeling the effects on a daily basis.

We all need to make a clear choice to act in a sustainable way. If people do not care for what is vulnerable in our world, the authorities must join forces and take action.

Plants and animals are created by God and of great value. The abuse of animals and the impoverishment of biodiversity are lamentable. We have a responsibility to protect the welfare of animals and the bounty of nature. Caution is called for with regard to genetic engineering. Government should oversee our joint responsibility.

Humans were created as the crown of creation. We are called to protect human life, from the tenderest beginnings to life's end. People in need deserve moral and practical support. The focus of care should always be on quality of life and the relief of suffering.

The care sector is constantly developing and we are able to make ever greater interventions in the human body. While we should thankfully and carefully make use of new techniques, the ethics of life should direct our technological developments and not vice versa. Imperfections are also a part of being human and the artificial prolongation of human life should never be an end in itself.

Ensuring the safety of citizens is a core duty of government. Responsible for defence, police and justice, governments punish crime. They intervene when people are abused as commodities or objects of lust. It is good when a society demands safety, but in this broken reality this demand should also be relativised. A safe society begins with our mutual connections and being of service to each other.

Countries work together internationally to promote security and peace. Evil can sometimes be stopped in its tracks by means of military intervention, although even then we should do everything possible to avoid creating innocent victims.

Prosperous countries should share their wealth and help alleviate hardship and suffering in the world. Aid should never leave people trapped in a relationship of dependence. The focus should be on strengthening people and their communities.

Ethics of life

Psalm 139:13-14

Safety and security

Augustine, De Agone Christiano (397)

International security

International aid

Enjoying what we have

Matthew 6:19-34

Climate

*Bartholomeüs I, On Earth as in heaven (2011)
Laudato si' (2015)*

Nature and animals

Genesis 9:8-17

Those who seek peace must make peace

A political attitude

Peace and justice are found not only in words but also in our attitudes and actions. Christians should also be guided by what the Lord asks of people: 'to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with your God.'

Anyone seeking peace must also be just. Social and political leaders need to set an example in living a good life. Those who pursue justice cannot avoid confrontation or be afraid to challenge evil head-on. Justice always aims to lift up the other person and knows how to show mercy.

Anyone seeking peace must be faithful. Leaders and representatives of the people should show integrity and reliability, in word and deed.

Anyone seeking peace should be humble. Our commitment here will always be a matter of perseverance. Christ is greater than people's imperfect words and deeds. He never allows Himself to be locked in a system or culture, in a party or programme. Perfect peace and perfect justice will only be there at His second coming.

Christians should work from the realisation that they are not alone in their quest for justice and peace. As God's ideas of good and evil continue to operate in everyone's consciences, let there be cooperation between those who wish to overcome evil with good.

In an often restless world Christians should rest assured that God is in control of this world and guides it with His Spirit. It is

good to keep praying for God's guidance, to keep thanking Him for what He gives us in this life.

A politics that looks to Jesus is a hopeful politics. He reigns, right through the brokenness. His Kingdom is our prospect for the future.

'His splendour will again appear in our land.

Loyal love and faithfulness meet;

deliverance and peace greet each other with a kiss.'

*Psalm 85:10-11
Nicolas Wolterstorff,
Until Justice and
Peace Embrace (1981)*

A final word

Micah 6:8

*Isaiah 55:8-9
Karl Barth, Der
Römerbrief (1922)
Declaration of Lausanne
(1974) art. 10*

*'Natural law'
Romans 1:19-20
Thomas Aquinas,
Summa theologiae (1265)*

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