

Justice – A Christian Role in Society

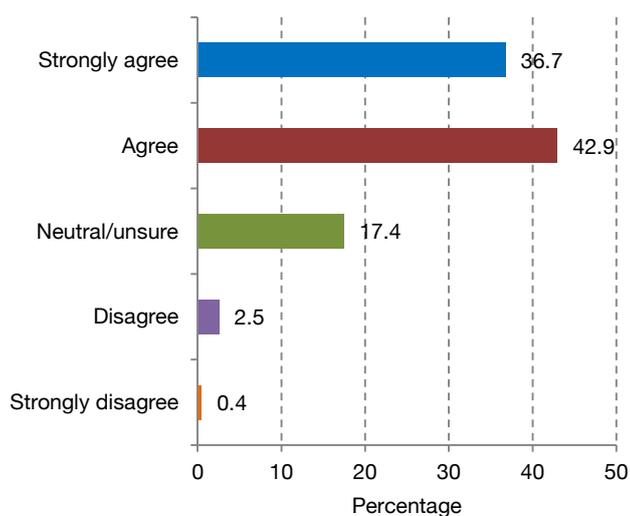
Working for change

The notion of a just society, where all have adequate access to resources, opportunity and a say in decisions that affect their lives, is a basic tenet of modern Western democracies. Christianity has long played a role in debates over what shape justice should take in the prevailing circumstances. Today, we are aware that social structures are not only somewhat fluid and changeable, but can also have effects that are sometimes unjust. The status quo is not necessarily eternal or inevitably good. Churches, Christians, and church-based NGOs have been involved in debate and active attempts to redress social and environmental issues. What are attenders' views on this issue?

In 2011 the National Church Life Survey asked a sample of Catholic, Anglican and Protestant attenders the following question:

“Do you agree or disagree: ‘Christians should work to change the structures of society in order to create a more just society?’”

Figure 1: Christians should work to create a more just society - overview



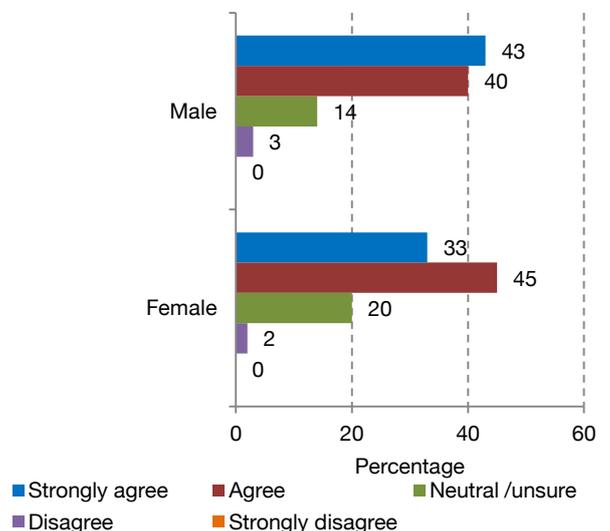
Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,430).

Overall findings

A large majority of attenders (80%) were in agreement with the idea that Christians should work to create a more just society (see Figure 1), including 37% who were in strong agreement. A small number (17%) were neutral or unsure, with only 3% in disagreement. The views of these attenders suggest that there is underlying support within the Christian community for active attempts to work for change that establishes a more just society. While the goal of social change is debated among churches and their members – with different groups at times holding opposing views in relation to a justice issue – it is clear that the current tenor of attenders' views is one of activism rather than withdrawal from social and political engagement.

Age, gender and education

Figure 2: Christians should work to create a more just society – by gender



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,397).

As shown in Figure 2, similar proportions of males and females either agreed or strongly agreed that Christians should work towards a more just society (83% and 78% respectively). Agreement increased with the age of attenders (see Table 1), the greatest discrepancy being between the 15-29 year olds (71%) and those over 70

years of age (83%). Those attenders with a university education were the most likely to either agree or strongly agree, and the least likely to be neutral/unsure.

Table 1: Just society by age and education

	Age				Education		
	15-29	30-49	50-69	70+	School	Trade cert	Degree
	Percentage						
Strongly agree	35	40	36	35	34	36	40
Agree	36	40	45	48	41	43	45
Neutral/unsure	26	18	16	14	21	19	12
Disagree	3	2	3	2	3	1	2
Strongly disagree	1	1	0	0	1	0	0

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,410 to 1,420)

Denominational differences

Within the overall support for Christians working for a more just society there are differences between denominations (see Table 2). The proportion of attenders who disagreed or strongly disagreed remained relatively constant across denominations. In contrast, those who agreed or strongly agreed ranged from the Lutherans' 77% up to Baptist/Churches of Christ with 84%. Lutheran attenders had the highest rate of people selecting 'neutral/unsure', contributing to their lower proportion of agreeing attenders. For Pentecostal attenders, 49% strongly agreed that Christians should be working towards a more just society; a greater proportion than any other denomination.

Table 2: Just society by denomination

	Angli- can	Baptist/ Church- es of Christ	Cath- olic	Luth- eran	Pente- costal	Unit- ing	Other Prot- estant
		Percentage					
Strongly agree	30	37	35	31	49	37	37
Agree	52	47	43	46	31	46	42
Neutral/unsure	15	13	19	22	19	15	18
Disagree	3	2	3	1	2	2	3
Strongly disagree	1	0	1	0	0	0	0

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,430).

Other demographic patterns

Those attenders who have been attending their church for 5 years or longer had the highest level of agreement (82%) out of the different backgrounds of attenders. Newcomers to church life had the lowest agreement, with 67% of newcomers agreeing or strongly agreeing that Christians should work towards a more just society. Newcomers were also the most likely to be neutral/unsure.

The proportion of attenders who agreed or strongly agreed rose with their level of attendance. Of those attending weekly or more, 81% were in agreement, compared to 60% of those who attended less than monthly.

Not only frequency of attendance, but frequency of private devotions, had an impact on attenders' level of agreement. Those who had devotions everyday/most days had 83% agreement, those who had them once/a few times a week had 79% agreement, those who had them occasionally had 78% agreement, and those who hardly ever had devotions had 66% agreement. The rate by which attenders were neutral/unsure also decreased as the frequency of devotions increased.

Summary

When faced with perceived social injustices, the majority of attenders in the 2011 survey were in agreement with Christians working to change the structure of society to create a more just society. The level of agreement among attenders varied as a function of certain demographic variables such as age, education and denomination.

Data sources

Powell, R., (2014) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

Citation

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