

A Christian Perspective on the Voice Debate: 4 Key Takeaways

By Akos Balogh

The debate over Australia's Indigenous Voice to Parliament is heating up.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has [endorsed](#) the [Uluru Statement from the Heart's](#) request for an Indigenous Voice to (Federal) Parliament, while Federal Opposition Leader Peter Dutton [is against it](#). My own Church, the Sydney Anglican Church, [endorsed a resolution late last year](#) to:

'[E]ncourage church members to give generous consideration to the case to vote 'Yes' to the referendum question of whether the Constitution should establish a First Nations Voice, once the details have been made clear.' [\[1\]](#)

Meanwhile, Indigenous politician Senator Jacinta Napijinpa Price has launched [her No campaign](#), and Indigenous commentator Nyunggai Warren Mundine also [proposes an alternative](#) to the Voice. It's an emotional issue for many people – Indigenous, non-Indigenous, Christian, and non-Christian.

I'm not here to argue for one side or the other. Instead, here are four things I've noticed about the Voice debate from a Christian perspective:

1) The 'Yes' and 'No' sides offer us two different versions of reality

On the Yes side, framers and supporters of the [Uluru Statement from the Heart](#) believe that a Voice to Parliament is an essential step forward in the well-being of Indigenous people:

'We call on all Australians to support a First Nations Voice to Parliament by voting Yes in the upcoming referendum, so we can finally have a say on policies and laws that affect our communities'.

However, the 'No' side gives a radically different picture of reality. Shadow Indigenous Affairs Minister Jacinta Nampijinpa Price's 'No' Campaign argues that the Voice [is divisive](#):

'[The Voice] puts racial separation in your constitution by giving a voice to one group, based on race, that no other group has or will have'.

And according to No campaigner Nyunggai Warren Mundine, the Voice [will dilute rather than empower](#) Indigenous people:

'If the Voice is enshrined in the Constitution, prescribed bodies corporate (representing native title claimant groups) and land councils (representing holders of land rights) will become just some of the many local community organisations in a vast region who'll somehow collectively nominate a member of the Voice which, with its constitutional enshrined status, will have primacy. Their voices for their own Countries will be diluted and drowned out.'

This isn't a marginal disagreement over semantic differences: we're being offered two very different versions of reality when it comes to the Voice. [\[2\]](#)

2) The Bible doesn't adjudicate between the two different versions of reality presented by the 'Yes' and 'No' Sides

Imagine the following two (real) scenarios:

First, imagine an White-Anglo Christian in Sydney who takes seriously the Bible's call to love their neighbour – especially their Indigenous neighbour. They see the trauma our nation has inflicted on our Indigenous population over the last 200+ years. And they hear the call of 80% of the Indigenous population, who desire a Voice as a way forward to meaningful improvement and reconciliation. [\[3\]](#) As a Bible-believing Christian, they see a 'Yes' vote as a straightforward way to fulfil the Bible's call to love their (Indigenous) neighbour.

In the second scenario, imagine an Indigenous Christian who has worked in grassroots Indigenous organisations helping vulnerable Indigenous kids and families in regional NSW for many years. They desperately desire an improvement in the lives of Indigenous people, also driven by Jesus' command to love their neighbour. However, in their experience and understanding, the Voice to Parliament will hinder rather than help. They see that a Voice (as currently promoted) would detract from Native Title organisations that deal directly with the government that help their tribal members. They don't feel the Voice will be representative of regional and remote communities. [\[4\]](#)

Now let me ask you this:

Which of the above two scenarios is the 'Christian' position?

Which position does the Bible endorse as loving your Indigenous neighbour, and which position does the Bible condemn as being unloving?

I want to gently suggest that there is no definitive 'Biblical' or 'Christian' position when it comes to voting on the Voice to Parliament.

Instead, while the Bible gives us many principles (such as love of neighbour) that must drive Christian ethics and decision-making, it stops short of advocating for a particular policy on many issues, including the Voice. In other words, there is no 'straight line' from the Biblical text to how you should vote.

As per the above two (real) scenarios, a clear Biblical command of Scripture – love of neighbour – could drive you toward voting for the Voice, or it could cause you to vote against it, depending on extra-Biblical factors such as your interpretation of the legal and cultural issues (more on that below).

Furthermore, the Bible doesn't give us a definitive answer on what extra-Biblical factors we must consider (or ignore) to vote for the Voice, let alone how much weight we give them, e.g.:

- Concerns around [Constitutional change](#),
- Potential divisiveness,
- Effectiveness in moving Indigenous well-being forward,
- Indigenous people's desire for a Voice.

The Bible is silent on all the above factors.

Thus, there is no 'straight line' from the Bible to how you should vote: only a 'jagged line'.

Here's how theologians Jonathan Leeman and Andrew Naselli explain the difference between a 'jagged line' issue and a 'straight line' issue:

For a straight-line issue, there is a straight line between a biblical text and its policy application. For instance, the Bible explicitly teaches that murder is sinful; abortion is a form of murder, so we should oppose abortion. That's a straight line. Accordingly [a church should] initiate the church-discipline process with a member who [calls themselves a Christian and] is advocating for abortion...[\[5\]](#)

They continue:

But for a jagged line issue, there is a multi-step process from a biblical or theological principle to a political position. [\[6\]](#)

They conclude:

Most political issues are not straight-line issues. Most are jagged-line issues. Think of everything from trade policy to healthcare reform to monetary policy to carbon dioxide emission caps. These are important, and Christians should bring biblical principles to bear when thinking about them. But the path from biblical text to policy application is not simple. It is complex. For such issues, none of us should presume to possess "the" Christian position, as if we were apostles revealing true doctrine once and for all time.' [\[7\]](#)

3) Thus, Christians are being asked to make interpretive decisions on issues the Bible doesn't adjudicate on

If the Bible doesn't answer these questions, then Christians can't look to the Bible *alone* for how to vote on the Voice referendum.

And that's not a shortfall of the Bible, as if God is somehow lacking in His communication to us: it's how the world operates under God's good Sovereign care. We need to think carefully about the issue, and interpret it, decide on, as best we can, for the good of those around us (Gal 6:10):

Is the charge that the Voice is racially divisive nonsense, or should we take it seriously?

Will the Voice change things for Indigenous people, or will it be a legal and cultural setback for our nation?

We'll have to interpret and work out these questions for ourselves (using Biblical principles, yes, but at the end of the day, we decide).

Thus, most political issues – including the Voice to Parliament – are what the apostle Paul in Romans 14 calls 'opinions' (ESV), or as the NIV translates it, 'disputable matters' (Rom 14:1). As per the previous point, God doesn't give a definitive ruling, so we have the freedom to make up our mind (Rom 14:5). [8]

4) Whether as a Christian you vote 'yes' or 'no' will not be determined by your theology alone but by your other extra-biblical beliefs

Christians need to be intellectually and morally honest as we approach a 'jagged line' issue like the Voice: how we vote and what we think about it will (by necessity) be driven by extra-Biblical factors, not just the Bible. Some of these extra-Biblical factors include:

- our prior political leanings,
- our background,
- the people around us (are they for or against the Voice?),
- our interactions with Indigenous people,
- whether we're Indigenous or not.

As Political Science professor David T. Koyzis points out,

'[M]any of the battles in the political realm are shaped, not simply by the refusal of one side or another to 'face facts' or 'be reasonable,' as one typically hears, but by differing views of reality rooted in alternative worldviews.' [9]

Thus, *for extra-Biblical reasons*, you might give some issues more weight than others: You might weigh the 80% of Indigenous people's support for the Voice more heavily than any Constitutional concerns (or vice-versa). As mentioned earlier, the Bible doesn't tell us which factor is more important, let alone what weight we should give them. We each decide, based on (among other things), the way we view reality.

And so, with a 'jagged line' issue such as the Voice, we need to be wary of baptising our position (that we arrived at based on factors outside the Bible) as the definitive Christian position.

[1] [Synod Summary 2022](#), Resolution 33/22, page 5.

[2] And, of course, there is a spectrum of views between these two opposing views.

[3] [Overwhelming majority of First Nations people support Voice to parliament, study suggests \(9news.com.au\)](#)

[4] Both these scenarios are based on conversations with real people, with identifying details slightly changed.

[5] Jonathan Leeman and Andrew David Naselli, "[Politics, Conscience and the Church: Why Christians Passionately Disagree with One Another over Politics, Why They Must Agree to Disagree over Jagged-Line Political Issues, and How](#)", *Themelios* 45.1 (2020): 13-31. 20. In their article, Leeman and Naselli take this 'Jagged line'/'Straight Line' distinction from Robert Benne, a conservative Lutheran scholar who specialises in how Christianity relates to culture.

[6] Leeman and Naselli, 20.

[7] Leeman and Naselli, 20.

[8] This, of course, raises important questions about how we relate to Christian brothers and sisters who think differently from us: we shouldn't quarrel with them over this issue (Rom 14:1) or treat them with contempt (Rom 14:10). Important words to remember as this issue heats up even more!

[9] David T. Koyzis, *Political Visions And Illusions – A Survey and Christian Critique of Contemporary Ideologies* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 8.

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