Christian nationalism in the UK: a contest for the nation's soul?

Peter Lynas outlines the debate on Christian nationalism in the UK, and asks how Christians can respond in faithful, hopeful and prophetic ways

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> **When Danny Kruger rose in the House of Commons earlier this year, he gave voice to something rarely heard in Britain's legislature: a call for politics explicitly rooted in Christian conviction.**

"We are a Christian country, or we were," he told MPs, "and we need to recover the sense that our values are not arbitrary but are grounded in the eternal truths of the Christian faith."

His remarks were delivered to a largely empty chamber but later went viral. They also signalled a growing debate about Christianity's role in Britain's national identity.

Across the Atlantic, such appeals are routine. In the United States, Christian nationalism has become a recognised political brand, with figures like the late Charlie Kirk declaring that America can only endure if it remains Christian. In Britain, the terrain is more fractured and understated, but no less significant. From Westminster speeches to Scottish politics, from populist rallies to arguments over the Church of England's future, the invocation of Christianity in public life is once again pressing and contested.

This article is a primer. It does not pretend to resolve the issue but aims to frame the debate. What is Christian nationalism? Who is associated with it? How does it play out across our supposedly "United" Kingdom? And how might Christians respond in ways that are faithful, hopeful and prophetic?

Crosses in the street: Tommy Robinson's rallies

If Kruger's call was made in the rarefied setting of parliament, a very different appeal to Christianity has been heard on Britain's streets.

When Tommy Robinson staged a mass gathering under the banner "Unite the Kingdom", more than 150,000 people attended. The rally was marked by conspicuous Christian symbolism. Crosses were carried, Bible verses quoted, worship songs sung; some even dressed as crusaders.

Sky News reporter Tom Cheshire described the event as "overt Christian nationalism": "People carried wooden crosses. One person had a light-up crucifix. When the crowd arrived at Whitehall, they were led from the stage in a chant of 'Christ is King'. And then a public recital of the Lord's

Prayer shortly after that. Compared to earlier Robinson rallies, it was not just a flag to rally around, but a religion too."

Some Christians welcomed Robinson's openness about faith, pointing to his claimed prison conversion. Others were deeply uneasy, warning against the co-option of Christian symbols to sanctify nationalism, xenophobia or violence.

Robinson's success in mobilising Christian imagery raises questions: Why are these symbols so resonant in nationalist movements? And why do many participants experience them as authentic religious expression? The challenge for churches is to pastor those who attended the march feeling frustrated and ignored as well as those who feel unsafe given what they saw, to denounce the misuse of Christianity and to provide an alternative public witness; proclaiming Christ as Lord without turning the cross into a tribal banner.

An American lens

If the British story feels unsettled and emergent, the American case provides a more developed model. There, Christian nationalism functions both as a theological current and a political machine. Its advocates argue that America's prosperity and freedom depend on maintaining Christian populations and laws. Networks of churches, media outlets, donors and activist groups sustain the movement, giving it coherence and reach.

A 2024 PRRI–Brookings survey found that 10% of Americans are committed Christian nationalists, while a further 20% are sympathetic. Respondents were asked about their agreement with five claims:

- The US government should declare America a Christian nation.

- US laws should be based on Christian values.
- If the US moves away from our Christian foundations, we will not have a country anymore.
- Being Christian is an important part of being truly American.
- God has called Christians to exercise dominion over all areas of American society.

There are challenges about how the results are interpreted, but the survey provides insight into how researchers understand and measure Christian nationalism.

This transatlantic connection matters because ideas travel – just look at the reaction to Charlie Kirk's assassination. Social media ensures that slogans coined in Phoenix can reappear in Preston, and organisational models for campus activism in the US can inspire parallel efforts in Britain. While the UK lacks the mega-church infrastructure of American evangelicalism, the aspiration to build a "Christian politics" is no longer confined to the other side of the Atlantic.

Four nations, one kingdom?

The Union Flag – often called the Union Jack – visibly embodies the complex relationship between Christianity and nationalism in Britain. It unites the crosses of three patron saints (none of whom were from the place they represent!):

- **St George (England):** a red cross on white, linked historically to the crusades. Ironically, George was probably a Turk, and possibly of Palestinian descent.
- **St Andrew (Scotland):** a white diagonal saltire on blue, said to symbolise the cross on which Andrew, one of the twelve apostles, was martyred.
- **St Patrick (Ireland):** a red saltire on white, representing Patrick, a fifth-century missionary and bishop, credited with converting much of Ireland to Christianity.

Wales is not directly represented, as it was already united with England in the 16th century and considered part of the Kingdom of England at the time the first Union Flag was created.

The flag itself is symbolic of a wider reality: the debate over Christianity and national identity looks different across the four nations of the UK.

Scotland: Scotland retains an established church, though its influence is waning. However, Kate Forbes, a devout Christian and SNP politician, came close to becoming first minister. Her views on marriage and abortion drew fierce scrutiny, but her example demonstrates how personal faith can contribute to a wider conversation on civic nationalism.

Northern Ireland: Here the picture is most complex. Nationalism has been linked with a united Ireland and unionism with loyalty to the United Kingdom. Both traditions reflect a form of nationalism and have drawn on religious identity, sometimes violently. Though the Troubles are largely over, flags, parades and painted kerbstones continue to mark out territory and reinforce division.

Wales: Disestablishment of the Anglican Church in Wales may have fostered a more secular civic culture, but Welsh politics features Christian “nationalists” committed to independence, alongside others who root their Christian vision in loyalty to the Union.

England: The Church of England remains established, binding Christianity to civic identity in ways not mirrored elsewhere. Bishops vote in the House of Lords and prayers are offered at the start of parliament. There are Christian MPs in each of the main political parties, but the role of faith is often minimised.

The “United” Kingdom, then, hosts a patchwork of Christian nationalisms, each shaped by local histories and political identities.

So, what do we mean by Christian nationalism in the UK?

At its broadest, Christian nationalism can be defined as an ideology that seeks to fuse national identity with a specific form of Christianity. It typically argues that a nation’s laws, culture and institutions should reflect Christian values, often claiming that the nation was historically founded on Christianity and must return to that heritage.

But the category is messy.

Is Danny Kruger a Christian nationalist because of his Commons speech? Does his alignment with Reform make the label more fitting? Does Kate Forbes qualify, or Christians in other parties whose “nationalism” affirms the union? Are they fusing national identity with a specific form of Christianity?

What about Nigel Farage, who rarely speaks of faith, or Rupert Lowe, who explicitly advocates a return to Christian foundations? And where do the Archbishop of Canterbury or even the King fit – are they not the ultimate fusing of national identity with Christianity?

If all these figures could be described as “Christian nationalists”, then perhaps the term risks losing precision.

Four orientations of Christian nationalism

A more helpful approach may be to distinguish between different orientations:

1. Confessional Christian nationalists (big C, small n)

Here the core commitment is to Christian faith itself. Patriotism flows from this, shaped by a belief that loyalty to the nation should reflect loyalty to God's justice and truth. Nationalism is not primary but flows from Christian faith. They may love their country deeply, but they interpret that love through the lens of discipleship, service and neighbour-love.

2. Cultural christian nationalists (small c, small n)

Here "Christian" means heritage more than belief. They value church buildings, carols and the moral tone of "Christian Britain", even if they rarely attend services or have a personal faith. They might tick "Christian" on the census, wave the Union Jack on royal occasions, or defend "British values" as vaguely Christian, but the content is fuzzy – Christianity is more comfortingly traditional than personally transformative.

3. Classic Christian Nationalists (Big C, Big N)

Both faith and nation are held with equal, passionate force. Britain is imagined as a *Christian* nation with a divine calling, and the church's mission is tied to national destiny. They see the cross and the flag reinforcing each other – "God save the King" is both prayer and policy. This is closest to the full-strength US model, though rarer in the UK.

4. Co-opted christian Nationalists (Big N, small c)

Nationalism takes the lead while Christianity is a handy prop. Church language or symbols are used to bolster British identity or resist perceived outside threats (immigration, secularism, "Brussels"), but

personal faith is optional. Calls for a “return to Christian values” serve mainly as cultural glue or political leverage rather than devotion.

These categories show that “Christian nationalism” in the UK is not a single movement but a spectrum – from heartfelt discipleship that shapes patriotism, to faith-as-heritage nostalgia, to outright political branding.

The prophetic task of the church

Christian nationalism is not (yet) the dominant force in Britain that it is across the Atlantic. But the signals are hard to miss: flags on the street, slogans in speeches and calls for a return to Christian values. The question is not whether Christianity will shape public life – it already does – but how. Will the name of Christ be used to feed grievance and exclusion, or to bear witness to the reconciling power of the gospel?

At its core, the Christian confession is not Christ is King as a political slogan, but Jesus is Lord as a radical reordering of allegiance. When we proclaim Jesus as Lord, every other loyalty – nationality, ethnicity, political ideology, even family – finds its place beneath His rule.

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That truth demands clarity.

We must resist the temptation to baptise nationalism and instead pray for a quiet revival rooted in repentance and renewal. We must be honest about our history – Christianity has shaped Britain's vision of human dignity, rights and equality, but it has also been entangled with crusade, empire and colonialism. We must be equally clear about our present – almost half the population call themselves Christian, around eight percent regularly practise their faith, and many of the most vibrant Christian communities come from global majority backgrounds.

The prophetic task of the church is not to retreat, but to be good news people in a bad news world.

We must hear the pain of people who feel ignored by those in power, who march in the streets and fly their flags, frustrated that no one else is listening. But we must also refuse the lie that the cross can be wrapped in a flag. When national identity is treated as sacred, patriotism risks becoming idolatry.

While respecting the right to march and affirm national identity, we must also acknowledge that for some the sight is unsettling and alienating. While naming the misuse of Christian symbols, we must also be alert to the fact that Christ often meets people in unexpected places and in uncomfortable ways.

While recognising the diverse cultural reality of modern Britain, we must not be silent about the Christian foundations that continue to shape our common life. While affirming the separation of church and state, we must also be clear that secular neutrality is both a myth and a failure. Every vision of society rests on a set of beliefs, and secularism has been found wanting.

While defending religious freedom and loving our neighbours, we must also hold fast to the uniqueness of Christ and the incompatibility of rival claims to ultimate truth. While welcoming the

refugee, we must create space for honest conversations about the impact of and limits to immigration.

If Britain is to navigate its contested future, the church must model another way. The church, with its diverse range of congregations, already offers a glimpse of what is possible: people united in Christ across ethnic, social, generational and cultural differences. Here is the vision we are called to embody – prophetic, hopeful and unashamed to say *Jesus is Lord.*

A deep dive into Christian nationalism in the UK

Christian nationalism explained

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How does the Bible tell us to treat immigrants?

Loving the stranger involves sacrifice, but it serves as a blessing for all when done well

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About Peter Lynas

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Peter oversees the advocacy team and the work of the Evangelical Alliance across the four UK nations. He is passionate about faith in the public square and leads the Being Human project with Jo Frost. He previously worked as a barrister in Belfast before studying theology at Regent College in Vancouver, where he serves on the board. Peter is a regular media commentator, is married to Rose, has two daughters, and loves running.

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