



# Countering Extreme Christian Claims in Mainstream Politics

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## Countering Extreme Christian Claims in Mainstream Politics

*By Paul Hedges*

### SYNOPSIS

*The “Unite the Kingdom” march was the first time in decades that Britain’s hard right brought significant numbers of people to the streets. Claims to Christian values and the protection of Judeo-Christian civilisation were part of its plan to draw the crowds. It marked a change from the hard right’s claims to Christian legitimacy being widely rejected as many ordinary Christians bolstered the numbers.*

### COMMENTARY

On Saturday, 13 September 2025, a march of more than 100,000 people, organised by Britain’s hard right, took place in London under the heading “Unite the Kingdom”. Contrary to claims, it failed to be London’s largest ever march, which was an anti-war march in 2003 with well over one million participants. Many of those present at the recent event would not before have been associated with the fringe extremists that organised the march. Part of the draw was Christianity.

The speeches started with the Lord’s Prayer, and various priests took to the stage throughout the day, leading the worship with hymns. However, [British bishops](#), [Church Times](#), a major Christian newspaper, and the [mainstream media](#) expressed dismay about the march’s racist organisers and their claims of faith. Some participants attended for [Christian motives](#), even if many could not explain how their faith related to their presence. Previous attempts by the hard right to legitimate themselves by appealing to Christianity had failed; however, this protest suggests a turning point.

### Claims to Christianity

The march was organised by [Stephen Yaxley-Lennon](#), a political provocateur with [links to Russia](#). Also known by his moniker, Tommy Robinson, Yaxley-Lennon was

the former head of the English Defence League (EDL), a defunct far right racist and Islamophobe outfit. The EDL, and the similar Britain First movement, sought Christian cover for racism and Islamophobia by carrying crosses on demonstrations. They were often challenged in [counter demonstrations](#) by Christians who decried their irreverent use of crosses as “[blasphemy](#)”.

When recently emerging from [prison yet again](#), Yaxley-Lennon was seen wearing a cross. The controversial pastor [Rikki Doolan](#), accused of [criminal activity](#) by investigative reporters, claims to have [converted](#) him in prison. Doolan was already known as an associate of Yaxley-Lennon and appears to be associated with [Islamophobic networks](#). Making claims to Christianity helps link British hard right movements to those in the United States, Hungary, and other places where the claim has been effective.

Scholars Hannah Strømmen and Ulrich Schmiedel have argued that [the claim to Christianity](#) is made by far right networks despite opposition from mainstream Christian churches. But the United Kingdom march seems to have more successfully linked Christianity, nationalism, and racism in the British context. Perhaps most notorious of the [priests](#) on stage was a New Zealand pastor, Brian Tamaki, who called for all [non-Christians to be banned](#) from Christian countries, explicitly naming Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Bahais. His calls to ban halal food and get rid of temples and shrines were greeted by cheers.

### **Conflating of Christian and National Values**

At least one social media account encouraged non-Christians to [attend church](#) the day after the rally, not as believers, but to show that they “believe in your country.” Meanwhile, professed [non-practising Christians](#) carried “Crusader” crosses to show their “patriotism”. Here we see the conceptual slippage between patriotism and religion, invoking both supposed “Christian” and “national” values.

The alleged “Christian values” differ between places and people. They may be in opposition to transgender and/ or LGBTQI+ legislation, anti-immigration (US Vice-President JD Vance linked Christian values to this before [Pope Francis discredited](#) his stance), or supportive of Tamaki’s anti-non-Christian stance. For some, there may be rose-tinted nostalgia about some imagined past; for others, pure racism, as in [white Christian Nationalism](#).

Linked to this, the phrase “[Judeo-Christian](#) civilisation” has been used by various people, such as the British far right politician Nigel Farage and the Norwegian terrorist Anders Breivik. The latter’s manifesto helped link this phrase to anti-Muslim, white nationalism, and opposition to multiculturalism and liberals. While Farage would distance himself from even Yaxley-Lennon, and his party, Reform UK, did not officially support the march in London, we see common [dog whistles](#) crossing the borders between various right-wing actors. There is a clear mixing of Christianity, whether as religion or civilisational ethos, with nationalism and ethnic belonging.

## Contamination and Alliances

Recently, the UK's centre-right has shifted [further to the right](#), and there is no clear distinction between what is [sometimes labelled](#) the far right (political actors) and the extreme right (militant actors). In the UK, the term "hard right" is often used to describe both. This may obscure distinct differences, but it helps highlight commonalities. Notably, despite violence against [journalists](#) and [police](#), parts of the supposed mainstream right-wing media have sought to [normalise](#) the event.

While Farage has distanced himself from Yaxley-Lennon, he is [believed by some](#) to share commonalities with the latter. When Farage speaks of "Judeo-Christian" civilisation, he is using the language of terrorist actors and those who espouse the great replacement theory – an extremist conspiracy theory that Muslims are purposefully replacing white Europeans. A speaker promoting this false theory was at the protest event. This issue is often wrapped in a religious imaginary that conflates love of country with hatred of others, whether this involves invoking the Crusades or a nebulous Judeo-Christian civilisation.

## Mainstreaming

The claims to Christianity make extremist messages appear normal. This relates to [Julia Ebner's](#) observations on how extremist groups have mainstreamed their discourse in society. We see [British members of parliament](#) proclaiming a [Christian nationalist vision](#), and [speakers](#) at the Unite the Kingdom demonstration, including [significant influencers](#), speaking out against diversity and common norms.

Centrist politicians have allowed hard right narratives to enter mainstream political discourse. This helped [validate](#) the extreme right attacks on hotels believed to hold asylum seekers in the UK. A general vilification of migrants, especially Muslims, including allegations of [grooming gangs](#), has also been normalised by supposedly mainstream parties playing into performative calls for action.

The normalisation of Christian nationalism in other national contexts, with links to racism, Islamophobia, and xenophobia, helps legitimise such discourse in the UK. This can occur via social media, with actors connecting concerns of some conservative Christians over issues such as transgender rights to other agendas, such as Islamophobia.

## Lessons for Multi-Cultural Societies

While Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer spoke up after the event, saying the flag – the Union Jack and other British insignia were widely on display – could not be hijacked by racists and extremists, [little practical effort](#) has been put into the work of counteracting the lies and disinformation of the hard right. There have been clear signs of the normalisation of hard right anti-immigrant discourse linked to claims about Christianity. These have often been seen as isolated discourses, but they are not. Meanwhile, many ordinary [people feel disenfranchised](#) and may have joined the event in general dissatisfaction with mainstream politics.

Singapore is often seen as [clamping down harshly](#) on even slight disruptions to its social fabric, and having harsh laws against disinformation, politicised religion, and offending the sentiments of either racial or religious groups. These have [been defended](#) as necessary bulwarks against the slide into extremism seen elsewhere. The current state of the UK may give credence to this narrative. But beyond legislation, the narrative told is important.

Effective communication about the benefits, both economic as well as social, of immigration has been lacking. Christian leaders, while [issuing statements](#), have not been good users of social media and rhetoric in pushing back against racist claims to Christianity, and are often seen as [out of touch](#). A solid defence of [multiculturalism and diversity](#) has been lacking, allowing [extremist talking points](#) to lead the conversation. The UK's hard right would almost certainly still be on the fringes if the alternative case had been well made.

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