



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on December 22, 2011

Britain's Cameron: Britain Is a "Christian Country"

In a speech commemorating the [400th anniversary](#) of the [King James Bible](#), which Cameron called, with Shakespeare, the zenith of the English language, he declared that the Bible is important for three reasons, the third being that Britain "is a Christian country."

Cameron was not speaking literally, given that Britain is hardly a "Christian" country in the sense that most of its subjects attend Christian services or defend the faith. He was, clearly, speaking of the country's historic character and culture, or what remains of them.



The Speech

The King James Bible, [Cameron said](#), is the cornerstone of British culture, and its publication might be the most significant moment in British history given all that it has meant to the world, not least in transmitting settled Christian truth. "The Bible is a book that has not just shaped our country, but shaped the world," Cameron said, speaking as a "vaguely practising" Christian but one "who will stand up for the values and principles of my faith."

The King James version, he noted, is unique:

First, the King James Bible has bequeathed a body of language that permeates every aspect of our culture and heritage, from everyday phrases to our greatest works of literature, music and art.

We live and breathe the language of the King James Bible, sometimes without even realising it.

And it is right that we should acknowledge this — particularly in this anniversary year.

"Second," the Prime Minister said, "just as our language and culture is steeped in the Bible, so too is our politics."

From human rights and equality to our constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy ... from the role of the church in the first forms of welfare provision, to the many modern day faith-led social action projects ... the Bible has been a spur to action for people of faith throughout history, and it remains so today.

But it was the last of the three reasons Cameron offered that created a furor: "Third, we are a Christian country," he declared. "And we should not be afraid to say so."

Naturally, Cameron carefully explained what he meant. "Let me be clear: I am not in any way saying that to have another faith — or no faith — is somehow wrong," [he said](#), adding,

I know and fully respect that many people in this country do not have a religion. And I am also incredibly proud that Britain is home to many different faith communities, who do so much to make our country stronger.



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But what I am saying is that the Bible has helped to give Britain a set of values and morals which make Britain what it is today. Values and morals we should actively stand up and defend.

The alternative of moral neutrality should not be an option.

You can't fight something with nothing. Because if we don't stand for something, we can't stand against anything.

[Cameron then elaborated](#) on each of his points, offering many of the quotidian aphorisms English-speaking people use every day, demonstrating that the political order of Christendom, and therefore Britain, is largely derived from Christian teaching and the Bible, and finally explaining that elevating the Christian religion to its rightful place does not require "doing down" other religions.

Cameron explained that Britain's culture, as well as a political order that mandates tolerance for minorities and their religions, grows from "Christian values."

"Yes, they are Christian values," [he said](#). "And we should not be afraid to acknowledge that."

But they are also values that speak to us all — to people of every faith and none. And I believe we should all stand up and defend them.

Those who oppose this usually make the case for secular neutrality. They argue that by saying we are a Christian country and standing up for Christian values we are somehow doing down other faiths. And that the only way not to offend people is not to pass judgement on their behaviour.

I think these arguments are profoundly wrong.

And being clear on this is absolutely fundamental to who we are as a people ... what we stand for ... and the kind of society we want to build.

First, those who say being a Christian country is doing down other faiths ... simply don't understand that it is easier for people to believe and practise other faiths when Britain has confidence in its Christian identity.

Some observers noted that Cameron erred in part of his exegesis, specifically in claiming that the Bible and Christianity were a "defining influence" in the creation of the modern welfare state, which might mislead Christians. In fact, leftist politicians, whatever their recourse to scripture, created the modern welfare state, which trespasses the Christian principle of [subsidiarity](#) as well as the virtues of [charity](#) and [justice](#).

Protests from the Left

Unsurprisingly, the enemies of Christianity were angered by the speech. The head of the [British Humanist Association](#), who doesn't appear familiar with such British historical figures as Sts. [Augustine of Canterbury](#) or [Thomas More](#), flatly claimed that Cameron is wrong. "As a simple factual statement what the Prime Minister said is incorrect — only a minority of people in Britain are practising Christians and over half of the population sees itself as non-religious according to the latest British Social Attitudes survey," [Andrew Copson claimed](#).

But critics noted that such an argument is a straw man. Cameron acknowledged that many Britons are not Christian, and was clearly speaking of the country's unspoken historic moral and cultural order.

Copson continued:

Although Christianity has undoubtedly had a sometimes positive influence on the cultural and



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social development of Britain, it is far from being the only influence. Many pre-Christian, non-Christian, and post-Christian forces have shaped our society for the better and Christianity has often had ill effects. So, on the factual level the Prime Minister's remarks are simply bizarre.

The most hopeful political reading of his speech is that Mr Cameron doesn't really mean it and that his statements are intended as a way to pacify the increasingly strident lobbying of a minority of Christians for more influence in our public life and greater privilege for those with Christian beliefs.

Copson [also accused](#) Cameron of peddling the myth that "those of non-Christian religions are best off in a Christian society — a claim unsupported by history and logic but one of the favourite arguments of activist Christian groups against a secular state. If this were the motivation behind the speech, at least it would give less reason to fear future policy initiatives shaped by these destructive ideas," he declared, adding,

Most concerning would be if the Prime Minister were serious. A politician and a government that tried to make Christianity and Christian beliefs the foundation of British values or a social morality would be building on seriously unstable foundations.

American lawyer [Jonathan Turley](#) also thinks Cameron is wrong. [Quoted here](#) yesterday for his assessment of the Obama administration's efforts to enforce a resolution from the United Nations that would curtail criticizing Islam, Turley wrote that Cameron's remarks are likely "a bit unsettling for almost 30 percent of people who list themselves as either having no religion or being non-Christian." As well, [he observed](#):

It is astonishing to see the assault on not just separation principles in England but on free speech principles ([here](#) and [here](#)). We have also seen [attacks on separation principle in our own country](#) as the West continues to toy with the incorporation of religious institutions and tenets in government ([here](#) and [here](#) and [here](#) and [here](#)).

Muslims Happy

One group happy about Cameron's remarks are Muslims, who share Cameron's belief that people of other religions are better off in Christian countries.

[Said Sheikh Ibrahim Mogra](#), of the [Muslim Council of Britain](#), "It's very seldom I get excited by what our prime minister has to say and this is one of those times. As Muslims we also believe in the Bible."

We believe in the teachings of Jesus. Not only that, but in the teachings of all the biblical prophets, including Moses in the Torah. So this is something that we feel is absolutely in tune with the Muslim thinking. We have to base our behaviour according to scripture, God's revealed message.

For a long time Muslims have been trying to express this idea, that for us as Muslims Islam is not just a religion but a way of life. To divorce politics from religion is not something we are able to do. We cannot leave our religion at home or in the mosques; it comes with us wherever we go. So it's refreshing to hear the prime minister say Christians should do the same. I agree Britain is the best country for Muslims to live in, at least in Europe.

Some observers wonder whether Mogra approves because Britain is [surrendering to Islamic demands](#) more quickly than other countries, meaning Islam is using the very Christian tolerance to which Cameron alluded to undermine the country.



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In February, [Cameron](#) declared that multiculturalism in Britain has failed.

Photo of David Cameron: AP Images



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