



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on December 12, 2012

Religious Freedom Under Assault in U.K., Christians Say

The government of the United Kingdom is  under fire from Christian organizations, churches, and activists for refusing to recognize the right of Christians to wear crucifixes and crosses at work — even in government-sector jobs — as Muslim women and Sikh men, for example, are guaranteed the right to wear their traditional religious attire regardless of their employers' wishes. Critics have slammed the policy and others apparently [aimed at silencing Christians](#) or [forcing them to act against their faith](#) as discrimination, but U.K. officials are currently defending some of the schemes at the so-called "European Court of Human Rights."

Perhaps the largest and most well-publicized battle surrounds two Christian women, one who worked for the government's National Health Service (NHS), who were fired from their jobs for wearing crosses to work. Coptic Christian Nadia Eweida, one of the two, was suspended from her job with British Airways in 2006 without pay for refusing to remove or hide a cross around her neck. The other woman, NHS hospital nurse Shirley Chaplin, was barred from her job on the ward by public officials for failure to hide the small cross she wore.

After failing to obtain relief from U.K. authorities for what they called discrimination, the two women filed a case with the Strasbourg-based European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) alleging that their right to freedom of religion enshrined in a European treaty had been violated. They were joined by another two Christians, a marriage counselor who was fired for refusing to provide "sex therapy" to homosexuals and a registrar disciplined for not wanting to conduct same-sex civil partnership ceremonies.

The European Convention on Human Rights, to which the U.K. government is a party, states in part that subjects are guaranteed "the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion" and "to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance." The freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs, the convention continues, is subject only to "necessary" limitations "prescribed by law" in the interests of public safety, order, health, morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

However, government officials from the U.K., where authorities refused to offer relief to the four plaintiffs, are now begging the controversial European court to approve of their actions. In its defense, the U.K. government claimed that wearing a cross is not a requirement of the Christian faith, but sporting a Muslim hijab or a Sikh turban at work is mandated by those religions. Critics, though, are speaking out about what they say is a double standard and an effort to trample all over Christians.

In an [exclusive interview with](#) *The New American* in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, earlier this year, Lord Christopher Monckton, a former advisor to ex-Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, slammed U.K.



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officials for their efforts to marginalize Christianity (see video below). The internationally recognized activist, who has built a reputation for standing up to the United Nations, climate hysteria, and efforts to destroy liberty, now wears a large crucifix around his neck while in public as a show of solidarity.

Lord Monckton was given the crucifix he now wears by a man who came up to him after a talk. "He took it off his neck and put it on mine, and he said, 'I want you to wear this because you've told me that you're going to go back to the UK and get a crucifix and wear it because you heard that ... the Prime Minister of the UK, David Cameron, announced that he has applied to Britain's new European masters for the right to ban the wearing of crucifixes in public, and you've said you're instinctive reaction on hearing this was to start wearing one in public to discourage him and others like him from discriminating poisonously in this way,'" Lord Monckton explained, recalling his conversation with the man who gave him the crucifix and asked him to explain why he was wearing it to others.

The move to marginalize Christianity in the U.K. is part of a broader international trend, too, according to Lord Monckton. "The secular and increasingly atheistic and anti-Christian governing class, in Britain and in many other countries, has got to learn that Christianity is here to stay," he continued. "We will not be bullied or persecuted, and if you think that you can start the persecution, in much the same way as they tried in Poland — by banning crucifixes in school classrooms and now as they're trying to ban me from wearing this crucifix in public — they will learn that what happened in Poland will happen to them: They will be removed from office, and those who are more tolerant of different religious points of view will form the new government."

Lord Monckton concluded his thoughts on the crucifix issue with some words for Prime Minister David Cameron: "Here is a warning to you Mr. Cameron: Step back, leave Christianity alone."

Of course, Lord Monckton is hardly the only prominent public figure to speak out. Numerous Christian leaders — Protestants and Catholics alike — have slammed the government's policies, too. Earlier this year, Catholic Cardinal Keith O'Brien of Scotland, for example, urged Catholics to display their crosses and crucifixes in public with pride while telling government officials not to fear the symbol of Christ's triumph, [reported](#) the *National Catholic Register*.

"Displaying the sign of the cross, the cross of Christ should not be a problem for others — but rather they should see in that sign an indication of our own desire to love and to serve all peoples in imitation of that love and service of Jesus Christ," Cardinal O'Brien was quoted as saying as the crucifix scandal was in the headlines this April. "Marginalization of religion should not be taking place at this present time — rather the opposite."

Tolerance, he said, is crucial. "Here in our own country where we do place a great emphasis on tolerance, surely our Christianity should be an indication to others of our desire, while living our Catholic Christian lives, to tolerate others who do not have our same values," Cardinal O'Brien continued. "Why shouldn't each and every Christian similarly wear proudly a symbol of the cross of Christ on their garments each and every day of their lives?"

Some liberty-minded analysts who strongly support both Christianity and religious freedom argued that it should be permissible for private employers to enforce dress codes as a condition of employment. However, a major problem, according to respected experts, is that the U.K. government is essentially claiming that members of some religions — Islam, for example — are entitled to receive official protection to wear their own religious garments even as Christians are denied that same privilege.

"My big worry with this approach is the idea that a secular government and secular courts are allowed



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to discriminate between religions based on theological points within the religions themselves,” [explained](#) attorney and national director Neil Addison with the Thomas More Legal Center in England, pointing to government protections of the Sikh turban and the Muslim head scarf. “There seems no awareness that this distinction is itself discriminatory because it gives a privileged legal position to those religions with specific and detailed rules as [it goes] against those with more flexible rules.”

According to Addison, the distinction made by government between what it will or will not protect illustrates a misunderstanding about the nature of religious practice itself — generally a complex combination of “rules, beliefs, customs and rituals that often may not be formally prescribed but which are, nevertheless, regarded by religious believers as integral parts of their faith.” Plus, he continued, Christians have regarded the wearing of a cross or crucifix as a fundamental custom for centuries, even if it was not formally required as an obligation of the faith.

“Therefore, to attempt to distinguish between the wearing of a cross and the wearing of a Sikh turban or Islamic hijab on the basis that one is required but the other is not is to create a completely theologically illiterate, artificial and unrealistic distinction,” the heavyweight attorney explained. “It is an approach that goes against the fundamental principle of a secular society with secular courts because it involves secular courts making religious decisions as to what is or is not compulsory in a religion.”

Multiple media outlets and scores of activists have also spoken out about the policies over the last year, even in recent weeks. “For years, the courts have appeared determined to push Christians to the margins of society by denying them the right to exercise their religious conscience or even wear a crucifix to work,” the *Daily Mail*, one of the U.K.’s largest newspapers, [wrote](#) in a piece published in mid-November discussing a more recent example of Christians being punished by government-linked employers for expressing their views.

Other battles surrounding religious freedom in the nation that have attracted international attention include an [ongoing effort by U.K. authorities to force Catholic adoption agencies](#) to either place children with homosexuals or basically shut down. The intersection between speech and faith, meanwhile, has also become an increasingly important issue in recent years. In one particularly extreme case, for example, an octogenarian [received a suspended jail sentence and is now being forced to wear an electronic monitor](#) for his pro-life activism. Others have been [arrested for Twitter posts](#) slamming the U.K. government’s participation in the occupation of Afghanistan.

With critics of the U.K. government’s increasingly totalitarian tendencies expressing serious concerns about the future of freedom, where it will all end remains to be seen. A Jewish columnist highlighted the danger in a recent piece entitled “[Spectre of Stalin in our land](#).” The final ruling by the controversial ECHR, an institution that advocates of national sovereignty have warned also represents a threat to freedom, is not expected until next year. But opposition to what more than a few analysts say is an assault on liberty and Christianity continues to grow stronger every day — in the U.K., and across the entire world as well.

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