

Talking about Jesus at work and home

Nations and the kingship of Christ

What Christians have said about Jesus the King, our rulers and our country, from the first century to today

Go deeper

St John's Church, Woking

Workplace & Neighbourhood Evangelism

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Before you read

This booklet is for anyone who's read one of the *What kind of King?* conversations (or been in a conversation like them) and wants to dig a bit deeper. "Christ is King" has been chanted at marches, painted on banners and argued about online, and it leaves a lot of people confused. "Is that what Christians are now?" "Shouldn't Christians be proud of Britain?" "Isn't the church supposed to keep out of politics?" Those are fair questions. The good news is that Christians have been thinking about them for two thousand years, often under rulers who wanted them dead, so we're not starting from scratch. Here you'll find the big picture, some of the best things Christians have said through the ages (in their own words, with links so you can read them for yourself), where good Christians see it differently, and the parts of the history we'd rather forget but shouldn't. Please don't feel you need to read it all in one go. Dip in. And it isn't about which party to vote for. It's about a King who wore a crown of thorns, and what it means to belong to Him wherever we live.

About this booklet

Whoever you are and wherever you're from, the King who wore a crown of thorns welcomes anyone who turns to Him: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

Goes with

- *What kind of King?*, *What kind of King? Sunday lunch* and *What kind of King? Over the gate*, and their *Hard questions* handout
- *You go soft on Islam because you're scared*, and its *Hard questions* handout
- *You should've been there*, and its *Hard questions* handout

Go deeper: the series

- *Giving and money*
- *Nations and the kingship of Christ* (this booklet)
- *Life, death and assisted dying*
- *Faith, truth and knowing*
- *Marriage, sex and sexuality*

How this booklet was made

This booklet was written with the help of AI (Claude, made by Anthropic). The AI did the research and wrote the drafts. A member of St John's chose the topic and decided what it should cover. They also read every draft, asked for changes and approved the final version.

AI can get things wrong, and it can sound very sure of itself when it does. So the booklet went through these checks before it got to you:

- **Quotations.** Every quotation from another writer has been checked word for word against its original source, and the Notes and the Bibliography say where each one comes from. Bible quotations have been checked against the NIV.
- **Theology.** Separate AI reviewers read the booklet against Scripture, the historic creeds and what Christians down the centuries have written about nations, rulers and the kingship of Christ. One reviewer was asked to hunt for error, for overstatement and for anything that might hurt someone who's struggling. Everything they found was put right and checked again.
- **Balance.** Where Christians see things differently (whether there should be an established church, for example), each view has been checked to make sure it gets a fair hearing. The history has been checked too, so that it gives the good alongside the bad.

- **Facts and figures** have been checked against their sources, and the help in Appendix A was checked on 23 October 2026.

It hasn't yet been reviewed by a trained theologian or a member of the clergy.

Please read it with care. Even after all these checks, some mistakes may remain. Test what you read against Scripture, as the Bereans did: they "examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true" (Acts 17:11). If something doesn't look right, please let Tim Parr know at timparr40@gmail.com.

The views in this booklet are the author's own. They don't necessarily reflect the views of the leadership of St John's Church.

The small print

Nations and the kingship of Christ · Go deeper · Version 1.4, October 2026. The help in Appendix A was checked on 23 October 2026. This booklet is general information, not legal or immigration advice.

Quotations from other writers are used for comment and discussion; you'll find each source in the Bibliography.

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1. The big picture

Seven things have stayed the same, from the earliest Christians to evangelicals today:

> **The Bible**
> "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place." (John 18:36)

- **Jesus really is King, now.** "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matthew 28:18). So "Christ is King" is true. The question is always *what kind of King*. He came "lowly and riding on a donkey" (Zechariah 9:9), and He told Pilate His kingdom isn't one His followers fight for (John 18:36).
- **Governments are God's servants.** "Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established" (Romans 13:1). So Christians pay their taxes, keep the law and "honour the emperor" (1 Peter 2:17), and that was most likely written under Nero.
- **But no government is God.** When the authorities told the apostles to stop preaching, they said: "We must obey God rather than human beings!" (Acts 5:29). That's for when a ruler orders something "manifestly contrary to an express command of God", or forbids "any thing which God has clearly enjoined", as Charles Simeon put it, not for when we just don't like a policy. We give "to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's" (Matthew 22:21). Christ's kingship judges every nation. It doesn't rubber-stamp any of them, ours included.
- **Nations are real and good, but not ultimate.** "From one man he made all the nations", and He "marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands" (Acts 17:26), so that people "would seek him" (17:27). Our countries and cultures are part of His good world. But the end of the story is "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language" (Revelation 7:9).

- **Love your country; don't worship it.** Exiles in Babylon, a city that wasn't even theirs, were told to "seek the peace and prosperity of the city" (Jeremiah 29:7), so caring about Britain and praying for it is a Christian thing to do. The problem comes when the nation gets the loyalty that belongs to Jesus. That's idolatry, even when it wears a cross.
- **Our first citizenship is in heaven.** "But our citizenship is in heaven" (Philippians 3:20). Christians are "foreigners and exiles" here (1 Peter 2:11), which means a Christian in Woking is family with a Christian in Lagos or Tehran, in a way that goes deeper than any passport.
- **Love the stranger, and pray for those in charge.** "The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself" (Leviticus 19:34), and Jesus says "I was a stranger and you invited me in" (Matthew 25:35). And Paul asks for prayers "for kings and all those in authority" (1 Timothy 2:1–2), whether we voted for them or not.

2. In their own words

Here are some of the best things Christians have said about Christ's kingdom and the nations, in date order. They're quoted exactly from the editions we link to (some are in older English, so there's a modern version underneath where it helps), and you can follow the link to read each one in context. Some of these writers got these things badly wrong elsewhere, and we haven't hidden that: it's in section 4.

The early church

> "They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers."
>
> The *Epistle to Diognetus* (an early defence of the faith, second century), chapter 5 · read it

One of the oldest descriptions of Christians we have, written by someone explaining them to an outsider. Look at the balance. Christians join in fully where they live, and yet they're never quite at home. Every country can be home, and no country is *the* home.

> "Without ceasing, for all our emperors we offer prayer. We pray for life prolonged; for security to the empire; for protection to the imperial house; for brave armies, a faithful senate, a virtuous people, the world at rest, whatever, as man or Cæsar, an emperor would wish."
>
> Tertullian, *Apology* 30 (about AD 197) · read it

Tertullian wrote this for an empire that was persecuting Christians, and look what he prayed for: a long life for the emperor, a safe empire, brave armies, good government. Wanting your country to be safe and well run isn't the problem. It's a Christian thing to pray for.

> "It is assuredly no part of religion to compel religion — to which free-will and not force should lead us" … "A Christian is enemy to none, least of all to the Emperor of Rome"
>
> Tertullian, *To Scapula* 2 (about AD 212), to a Roman governor · read it

Two things worth holding together. Faith can't be forced, so pressure and intimidation have no place in it. And Christians aren't anybody's enemy, not even the ruler persecuting them.

> "For religion is to be defended, not by putting to death, but by dying; not by cruelty, but by patient endurance; not by guilt, but by good faith"
>
> Lactantius, *Divine Institutes* V.20 (early 300s) · read it

If someone talks about "defending Christian Britain", this is a good one to know. The early Christians defended the faith by being willing to suffer for it, not by making others

suffer.

> "But they, too, who would forbid the city to strangers cannot have our approval. They would expel them at the very time when they ought to help … Beasts do not drive out beasts, yet man shuts out man."
>
> Ambrose of Milan, *On the Duties of the Clergy* III.7.45 (about AD 391) · read it

During a famine, Rome expelled its foreigners to save food. Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan, called it out, and praised an official who raised money to feed them instead. In context, it's about throwing out people who were already living there in a crisis. It isn't a ruling on how a country should manage who comes in. But the "they'll take our food" argument gets short shrift.

> "You received Me, He says, into your lodging, I will receive you into the Kingdom of My Father; you took away My hunger, I take away your sins; you saw Me bound, I see you loosed; you saw Me a stranger, I make you a citizen of heaven"
>
> John Chrysostom, *Homily 45 on Acts* (about AD 400), on Matthew 25 · read it

Chrysostom urged every Christian household to keep a room ready for strangers. His point: when we welcome a stranger, we welcome the King. And the King makes strangers into citizens.

> "This heavenly city, then, while it sojourns on earth, calls citizens out of all nations, and gathers together a society of pilgrims of all languages, not scrupling about diversities in the manners, laws, and institutions whereby earthly peace is secured and maintained … It therefore is so far from rescinding and abolishing these diversities, that it even preserves and adopts them, so long only as no hindrance to the worship of the one supreme and true God is thus introduced."
>
> Augustine of Hippo, *City of God* XIX.17 (written 413–426) · read it

Augustine says the church doesn't wipe out nations and cultures; it's happy to keep them. But it draws its people "out of all nations", so no nation owns it.

The Reformation and the evangelical revival

> "For faith is a free act, to which no one can be forced. Indeed, it is a work of God in the spirit, not something which outward authority should compel or create."
>
> Martin Luther, *Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed* (1523) · read it

This is Luther's "two kingdoms" book. Christ rules His people by His word and Spirit; the government holds the sword to keep the peace. In the same book he says that the world and the masses "are and always will be un-Christian, even if they are all baptized". A country isn't Christian just because it has a Christian past. (Luther didn't always live up to this. See section 4.)

> "The Lord, therefore, is King of kings. When he opens his sacred mouth, he alone is to be heard, instead of all and above all. We are subject to the men who rule over us, but subject only in the Lord."
>
> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* IV.20.32 (1559) · read it

The last section of Calvin's great book, and it says it all in a sentence. Obey your rulers, but "only in the Lord". Calvin spent most of that chapter defending government against people who said Christians should have nothing to do with it, so he isn't anti-authority. He just knew who the real King is.

> "The men told them that they were pilgrims and strangers in the world, and that they were going to their own country, which was the heavenly Jerusalem"
>
> John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), at Vanity Fair · read it

Bunyan probably wrote much of this in prison, for preaching without a licence. At Vanity Fair, it's the Christians who are mocked as "outlandish men", the foreigners in town. Worth remembering when we decide whose side we're on.

> "The Bible is my system of politics. There I read, that the Lord reigns; ... My part, as a minister of the gospel of peace, is not to inflame, but, if possible, to soothe and sweeten the spirits of my hearers ... I hope we are now met, not to accuse others, but to confess our own sins—not to justify ourselves, but to plead for mercy."
>
> John Newton, sermon on the national fast day, 21 February 1781 · read it

Newton (who wrote "Amazing Grace") preached this in the middle of a war that was going badly. It would have been easy to blame someone. Newton started with "our own sins". That's a brilliant model for any of us when the country feels like it's falling apart. And notice that not inflaming people wasn't a nice extra for Newton. He saw it as his job.

> "In the language of Scripture, Christianity is not a geographical, but a moral term. It is not the being a native of a Christian country"
>
> William Wilberforce, *A Practical View of Christianity* (1797), chapter IV · read it

Wilberforce, the MP who fought the slave trade for twenty years, was writing to people who called themselves Christian because they'd been born in England. His point: being British doesn't make you a Christian. Being made new by Christ does.

> "Other kings exercise their sway over those only who are born in a particular country: but in whatever country these persons live, they belong to Christ; to Christ supremely, to Christ only."
>
> Charles Simeon, *Horae Homileticae*, "Christ's Good Confession", on John 18:37 (published 1833) · read it

Simeon was vicar of Holy Trinity, Cambridge, for over fifty years, and one of the fathers of evangelical Anglicanism. A King with subjects in every country, and no army.

The 19th century

> "He was no Caesar—you cannot make Him appear like one. … 'My kingdom,' says He, 'is not of this world.' For troops, He has a host of sorrows, for pomp, a surrounding of scorn—for lofty bearing, humility—for adulation, mockery—for homage, spitting—for glory, shame—for a throne, a cross."
>
> C. H. Spurgeon, Sermon 1353, "Ecce Rex" ("Behold the King", 1877) · read it

This is the heart of it. If you want to know what kind of King Jesus is, look at the crown of thorns. "For a throne, a cross." Spurgeon adds that He rules "not by extraneous force", but because "our hearts have voluntarily surrendered to Him".

Today

> "Because men and women are made in the image of God, every person, regardless of race, religion, colour, culture, class, sex or age, has an intrinsic dignity because of which he or she should be respected and served, not exploited."
>
> The Lausanne Covenant (1974), section 5 · read it

The Lausanne Covenant was drawn up by evangelical leaders from all over the world, with John Stott as its chief drafter, and it's still one of the clearest statements of what evangelicals believe. "Regardless of race, religion, colour, culture." Every person we meet, whoever they are and wherever they're from, bears God's image.

3. Where Christians see it differently

On the big things, Christians agree. On some of the details, good, Bible-believing Christians land in different places, and that's fine. Here are four of the biggest.

How the church relates to the government

There are three main views, all held by faithful evangelicals today:

- **Two kingdoms.** God rules the world in two ways: through government (with the sword, for order and justice) and through the church (with the word, for salvation). Keep them distinct. The case: Romans 13 gives the sword to the state; Jesus said His kingdom "is not of this world" (John 18:36) and told Peter to put his sword away. This is Luther's view, and many Reformed Christians hold a version of it. The danger it watches for: the church turning into a political party.
- **Christ's lordship over every area of life.** Often linked with the Dutch theologian and prime minister Abraham Kuyper (around 1900). The case: "in him all things were created … whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities" (Colossians 1:16), and "the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it" (Psalm 24:1). So Christians should bring Christ's will to politics, business, schools and the arts, while respecting each one's proper sphere. Kuyper's own famous line: "there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!'" (trans. James Bratt, as quoted by Wes Bredenhof; read it). But he never meant a state that enforces faith: "The government bears the sword which wounds; not the sword of the Spirit, which decides in spiritual questions" (read it), and his paper's motto was "A free Church in a free State". He cared about the poor, too: in 1891 he gave the opening address at the First Christian Social Congress in Amsterdam, on the poor and the "social question", published in English as *The Problem of Poverty* (read it). The danger it watches for: a faith that's switched off from Monday to Saturday.
- **The church as a different community.** Rooted in the Anabaptists of the 1500s and the free churches since. The case: Jesus called His followers to love enemies (Matthew 5:44) and not to "lord it over" others as rulers do (Mark 10:42–45), and Paul says "Do not conform to the pattern of this world" (Romans 12:2). So the church's main job isn't to run the country but to be a living picture of the kingdom: forgiving, sharing, peaceable. Many in this tradition are wary of using state power at all. Their first confession, at Schleitheim in 1527, put it like this: "The sword is ordained of God outside the perfection of Christ" (read it). So government is God's gift, but it's not the church's way, and it went on to say a Christian shouldn't be a magistrate. (That's where most evangelicals part company with them: think of Joseph, Daniel and Erastus, "the city's director of public works" (Romans 16:23).) The danger it watches for: the church being bought by power.

All three agree that Christ is Lord, that the government isn't, and that nobody can be made a Christian by law.

Should there be an established church?

St John's is part of the Church of England, which is "established": the monarch is its Supreme Governor, and some of its bishops sit in the House of Lords. The case for it: a nation can publicly acknowledge God ("Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord", Psalm 33:12), there's a parish church for everyone, Christian or not, and the church gets a voice where laws are made. Even the 1788 American revision of the Westminster Confession, which dropped any state church, still called rulers to protect the church "as nursing fathers", borrowing from Isaiah 49:23. The case against: Baptists and other free churches have long argued that the state has no business in the church. Roger Williams, in 1644, said Old Testament Israel was "no pattern nor president for any kingdom or civil state in the world to follow" (by "president" he meant "precedent") (read it). And an established church can make people think they're Christians because they're English, which is exactly what Wilberforce was worried about.

Either way, an established church isn't the same as nationalism. Wherever you land, it's a question about how a church is organised, not about who belongs to Christ.

Should a nation be "Christian"?

Some sincere Christians argue that a nation ought to honour Christ publicly in its laws and its life. Their case: Psalm 2 tells the kings of the earth to "Serve the Lord with fear" and "Kiss his son" (Psalm 2:11–12); "Righteousness exalts a nation" (Proverbs 14:34); and Britain's laws, freedoms and care for the weak grew out of the gospel, so why be shy about it? They'd add that no government is really neutral: every law rests on some idea of right and wrong, so why shouldn't ours be openly Christian? There's real truth in that last point. A lot of what our country still values, like the dignity of every person and care for the poor, came from Christianity, and it's right to say so.

It's worth separating two different things here. One is the old belief that rulers should honour Christ and protect true religion, which Calvin, the Westminster Confession and the Church of England's own Articles all held in some form, and which some Christians still hold today. The other is "Christian nationalism": treating being Christian and belonging to one nation, people or political movement as if they were the same thing. They aren't the same, and it isn't fair to lump them together.

Most evangelicals today would rather have freedom of religion for everyone (the Lausanne Covenant asks governments to guarantee "freedom of thought and conscience"), and almost all reject Christian nationalism, for three reasons. First, in the New Testament the people of God is the church, gathered from every nation, not any one country (Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 2:19). Second, faith can't be required by law: you can make people go to church, but you can't make them believe (that's Tertullian, Lactantius and Luther, all in section 2). Third, when a nation is treated as specially chosen, it's very easy for Christ to become a mascot for "us" against "them". Hymn-writers haven't always helped. Isaac Watts, who wrote "Jesus shall reign where'er the sun", also rewrote Psalm 67 to begin "Shine, mighty God, on Britain shine" (read it). But the same hymn goes straight on to pray that "distant nations know and love / Their Saviour and their God".

So the line most evangelicals draw: let's be glad of our Christian heritage and pray for revival. But Christ isn't more British than He is anything else.

Immigration and borders

Good Christians come to different conclusions on policy, and both sides have a biblical case.

- **The case for limits and order.** God "marked out … the boundaries of their lands" (Acts 17:26). Government is given to keep order and justice (Romans 13:1–4), and that includes deciding who can settle and how. Thomas Aquinas (13th century) noted that in Old Testament Israel newcomers "were not at once admitted to citizenship" (read it). Scripture also gives us particular duties to the people closest to us: anyone who doesn't "provide for their relatives" has "denied the faith" (1 Timothy 5:8), and we "do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (Galatians 6:10). Christians have long called this the "order of love": we love everyone, but not everyone is equally our responsibility. Many argue that a government owes something like that to its own citizens first. Caring about the effect on communities, wages and public services isn't wicked. The Evangelical Alliance puts it well: "While welcoming the refugee, we must create space for honest conversations about the impact of and limits to immigration." (read it)
- **The case for generous welcome.** Again and again God tells Israel to love the foreigner, "for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt" (Deuteronomy 10:19). Jesus makes welcoming the stranger a sign of welcoming Him (Matthew 25:35). (Some careful readers think "the least of these brothers and sisters of mine", in verse 40, means Jesus' own followers in need. Even so, Leviticus 19 and the Good Samaritan make it plain that love for the stranger reaches beyond the church.) Ambrose and Chrysostom (section 2) both speak up for strangers, and Calvin says that "sojourners and strangers" count as our neighbours along with our own families (read it).

What everyone agrees on: policy is a matter of wisdom, and Christians can vote and argue differently on it. None of these verses, on either side, writes the policy for us. But the person in front of us, whoever they are, and whatever we think about how they got here, is made in God's image and is our neighbour. Christians haven't always lived this out (section 4 has the evidence). But the Bible gives nobody licence to treat a stranger with contempt, and the great voices of the church in every century have said so. And both sides need to listen: someone worried about their town isn't a bigot, and someone campaigning for refugees isn't naive.

4. The history, good and bad

It would be easy to quote only the good bits. But the history of Christians and power has some very dark patches, and it's better that we know about them than that someone throws them at us in a conversation and we're caught off guard. Here are six. And in each one you'll find the other half too: Christians who saw it was wrong, and often led the way out.

From persecuted to powerful

For nearly three hundred years Christians were a persecuted minority, and they argued for freedom of belief (section 2). Then Emperor Constantine became a Christian, and in 313 he and his co-emperor Licinius agreed that "the Christians and all others should have liberty to follow that mode of religion which to each of them appeared best" (read it). Freedom for everyone, notice, not just for Christians. It's easy to see why Christians were thankful: they'd just come through the worst persecution of all. And the freedom bore real fruit. Unlike many of their neighbours, Christians had refused from the start to abandon unwanted babies (they "do not destroy their offspring", says the *Epistle to Diognetus*; read it), and now they could care for the sick and poor in the open. Basil of Caesarea built a whole complex outside his city for them, which his friend Gregory called "the new city, the storehouse of piety" (read it). Even the pagan emperor Julian grumbled that "the impious Galilaeans support not only their own poor but ours as well" (read it).

But the freedom for everyone didn't last. The church historian Eusebius, one of Constantine's great admirers, came to describe the emperor's rule as a copy of God's own, and some Christians saw the danger. An old bishop, Hosius of Córdoba, who had suffered under the pagan persecution, wrote to Constantine's son:

> "Intrude not yourself into Ecclesiastical matters, neither give commands unto us concerning them; but learn them from us. God has put into your hands the kingdom; to us He has entrusted the affairs of His Church"
>
> Hosius of Córdoba, letter to the Emperor Constantius (about AD 356) · read it

Two different trusts from God: the throne and the church. By 380 the emperors had made one form of Christianity the official religion of the empire, and other kinds of Christian were declared heretics. Before long the church was using the state against its own. Augustine, whom we quoted warmly in section 2, came round to supporting the empire's fines and penalties against a breakaway group, the Donatists. He was open about how his mind changed, in a letter written in 408.

> "For originally my opinion was, that no one should be coerced into the unity of Christ, that we must act only by words, fight only by arguments, and prevail by force of reason … But this opinion of mine was overcome not by the words of those who controverted it, but by the conclusive instances to which they could point."
>
> Augustine of Hippo, Letter 93 (AD 408) · read it

He still pleaded with the authorities not to put them to death. But his arguments were used for centuries afterwards to justify far worse. (In fairness, the Donatist extremists had used violence themselves. But the lesson stands: once the church has the state's power, it's very tempting to use it.)

The Crusades

First, the reasons, because they matter. In the 600s and 700s Arab armies conquered lands that had been Christian for centuries: Syria, Jerusalem, Egypt, North Africa and most of Spain. Christians went on living under Muslim rule there for centuries, at times in peace and at times not: in Egypt the Caliph al-Hakim persecuted Christians and Jews alike (read it), and in 1009 he had Jerusalem's Church of the Holy Sepulchre, built over the traditional site of Jesus' tomb, torn down (it was later rebuilt). Then the Seljuk Turks crushed the Byzantine army at Manzikert in 1071 and soon held most of Asia Minor, and pilgrims faced real danger on the roads. In 1095 the Byzantine emperor asked the Pope for help, and Urban II called for an armed expedition east. Weeks later he wrote:

> "Your brotherhood, we believe, has long since learned from many accounts that a barbaric fury has deplorably afflicted and laid waste the churches of God in the regions of the Orient." … "as a preparation for the remission of all their sins."
>
> Pope Urban II, letter to the faithful in Flanders, December 1095 (trans. August C. Krey, 1921) · read it

So, as Urban told it, this was help for eastern Christians (historians add that he had other aims too, like strengthening the papacy's leadership). And most crusaders weren't the land-hungry younger sons of the old textbooks: going was ruinously expensive, and many went out of real devotion. But look at those last words. Going to fight was offered as a penance, and whatever exactly Urban meant (historians still argue), many crusaders heard it as "fight, and your sins are forgiven". That was the deep mistake. Forgiveness is God's free gift, paid for by Christ's death, not by ours or anyone else's (Ephesians 2:8–9), and Jesus never let His followers fight for His kingdom. On the way, in 1096, crusading bands massacred Jewish communities in the Rhineland, and when Jerusalem fell in 1099, many of its Muslim and Jewish inhabitants were slaughtered. A crusader chaplain who saw it wrote:

> "Piles of heads, hands, and feet were to be seen in the streets of the city." … "Indeed, it was a just and splendid judgment of God that this place should be filled with the blood of the unbelievers, since it had suffered so long from their blasphemies."
>
> Raymond of Aguilers, on the fall of Jerusalem, 15 July 1099 (trans. August C. Krey, 1921) · read it

A massacre, called God's "just and splendid judgment". Even Bernard of Clairvaux, one of the most loved preachers of the Middle Ages, could write, in praise of the Knights Templar (*In Praise of the New Knighthood*, about 1130), that "The Christian glories in the death of the pagan, because Christ is glorified" (trans. Conrad Greenia; read it), though he also said pagans shouldn't be killed if there was any other way to protect believers. Some saw it differently at the time: the chronicler Albert of Aachen said the men who massacred the Rhineland Jews did it for money, not for God's justice, and that God turned against them for it. God, he wrote, forces nobody into the faith.

And in 1204 a crusade sacked Constantinople, the great Christian city of the east, turning on the very Christians the crusades had first set out to help. (In 2001 Pope John Paul II said of it that "The fact that they were Latin Christians fills Catholics with deep regret" (read it).) So it wasn't an unprovoked attack on a peaceful Muslim world, but it wasn't a clean war of defence either. Whatever the causes, killing in Christ's name is the very opposite of a King who rebuked His disciples for wanting to call down fire on a village (Luke 9:54–55).

The Reformers used the sword too

Luther's 1523 principle was beautiful (section 2), but in later years he backed rulers punishing religious dissenters, and he wrote shamefully about the Jewish people. Calvin's *Institutes* gave rulers the duty to stop "idolatry" and "blasphemy" spreading (IV.20.3), and in 1553 Geneva burned Michael Servetus for heresy, with Calvin pressing the charges (he asked for a quicker death, not for mercy). But at the time almost everyone agreed: the Catholic authorities in France had already condemned Servetus and burned him in effigy (read it), and the other Swiss Protestant churches backed Geneva (read it). But not quite everyone. The next year Sebastian Castellio and his friends published, under a false name, a plea for religious liberty (read it). And in 1903 Calvin's own heirs put up a monument where Servetus died, "condemning an error which was that of his age" (read it). The original Westminster Confession of 1646 told rulers to make sure "that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed" (read it).

Anabaptists were drowned and burned, by Protestants as well as Catholics: one of their first leaders, Felix Manz, was drowned in Zürich in 1527, praying "Into thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit!" (read it). Fear of rebellion played its part, but most Anabaptists were peaceful people who simply wanted a church of believers, free of the state. It took other Christians, like Roger Williams and John Owen (who called violence in religion "the shame and stain of Christianity"), to say from the Bible that this was

wrong. American Presbyterians rewrote that chapter of the Confession in 1788, so that rulers should not "in the least, interfere in matters of faith" (read it).

The divine right of kings

In 1598 James VI of Scotland (soon to be James I of England) set out the "divine right of kings":

> "Kings are called Gods by the prophetical King Dauid, because they sit vpon GOD his Throne in the earth, and haue the count of their administration to giue vnto him."
>
> **In today's English** *"Kings are called gods by the prophet-king David, because they sit on God's throne on earth and must give account to Him for how they rule."*
>
> James VI, *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies* (1598) · read it

So the king answers to God alone, and even a wicked king must never be resisted by his subjects. (James did say that God would be a king's "sorest and sharpest schoolemaster".) It sounds very biblical, and Romans 13 was quoted for it constantly. And it's easy to see why it appealed: in 1570 the Pope had declared Elizabeth I deposed and her subjects "absolved" from their oaths to her (read it), so a king who answered to God alone looked like a defence against chaos. Catholics had their own grievances: Elizabeth's laws punished them for staying away from the parish church (read it), and from 1585 the law treated their priests as traitors, so many were put to death simply for being priests (read it). Christians answered from the Bible too. The Scottish minister Samuel Rutherford argued in *Lex, Rex* ("the law and the king", 1644) that "the law, in that consideration, is above the king" (read it), and that "absolute power to tyrannise over the people and to destroy them is not a power from God" (read it). Rulers are God's servants, not God's replacements.

Empire and slavery

Britain grew rich partly on the slave trade, and many Christians went along with it. George Whitefield, one of the greatest evangelists who ever lived, wrote in 1751: "As for the lawfulness of keeping slaves, I have no doubt" (read it). He campaigned for slavery to be allowed in Georgia and owned slaves for his orphanage. John Wesley saw the hypocrisy clearly, writing of how Africans were seized: "Thus the Christians preach the Gospel to the Heathens!" (read it). Yet even Wesley's pamphlet ends with a hymn verse that, while praying for their salvation, calls Africans "the servile progeny of Ham", an old racial misreading of Genesis 9 (where the curse actually falls on Canaan). Wilberforce, a hero of this booklet, also valued Christianity partly because it kept "the lower orders" content with their lot. Abraham Kuyper (section 3) read the same story of Noah's sons into history in 1898: "No impulse for any higher life has ever gone forth from the third group" (read it). He didn't invent apartheid, but its theologians later drew on ideas from his tradition, bending them to their own ends. Our own church isn't exempt: a Church of England missionary society (the SPG, now USPG) owned slave plantations in Barbados, and in 2023 the Church Commissioners said they were "deeply sorry" that the fund they grew from had links with the slave trade (read it). Good Christians can have deep blind spots, especially where their own nation's interests are involved.

But that's only half the story. The campaign that ended Britain's slave trade was overwhelmingly a Christian one. Quakers sent Parliament the first petition against the trade in 1783, and in 1787 nine Quakers and three Anglicans, including Thomas Clarkson and Granville Sharp, founded the committee to abolish it (read it). Olaudah Equiano, who had been enslaved as a boy and was baptised in Westminster in 1759, told his story in a best-selling book in 1789 and campaigned with other black abolitionists (read it). John Newton, who had captained slave ships, wrote against the trade. And days before he died, Wesley wrote to Wilberforce: "Go on, in the name of God and in the power of His might, till even American slavery (the vilest that ever saw the sun) shall vanish away before it" (read it).

Enslaved Christians fought for their own freedom too: in Jamaica at Christmas 1831 Sam Sharpe, a Baptist deacon, led a peaceful general strike that turned into a great uprising, and he was hanged for it in May 1832 (read it). The next year Parliament passed the Slavery Abolition Act, with £20 million in compensation paid to the slave-owners, and nothing to the enslaved, who were first tied into "apprenticeship", another form of unfree labour for fixed terms (read it). Christians read the same Bible both ways, and in the end the abolitionists' reading won.

Missions were a mixed story too. Evangelicals admitted in 1974 that "Missions have, all too frequently, exported with the gospel an alien culture" (the Lausanne Covenant, section 10). At worst, in Canada, church-run schools took Indigenous children from their

families, and in 1993 the head of the Anglican Church of Canada said: "I am sorry, more than I can say, that we were part of a system which took you and your children from home and family" (read it). But it was a Baptist missionary, Alice Seeley Harris, whose photographs of atrocities in the Congo's rubber plantations helped force King Leopold II to give up his private colony (read it). And a major study in 2012 found that Protestant missionaries who sought converts were "a crucial catalyst" for mass education, printing and newspapers in the countries they served, and so helped lay the ground for democracy (read it).

Apartheid and the German church

In the 20th century, two churches lent their theology to racist nationalism. In South Africa, the white Dutch Reformed Church gave apartheid a biblical justification, drawing on the Tower of Babel, the list of nations in Genesis 10–11, and the very verse we quoted in section 1 about God marking out "the boundaries of their lands" (Acts 17:26), ignoring its first words, "From one man he made all the nations". In 1982 the World Alliance of Reformed Churches declared apartheid a sin, and its theological justification a heresy, and suspended the church's membership. The same year the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (the separate church for "coloured" Christians, whose members lived under apartheid) began its Belhar Confession (adopted in 1986). It says:

> "that any teaching which attempts to legitimate such forced separation by appeal to the gospel, and is not prepared to venture on the road of obedience and reconciliation, but rather, out of prejudice, fear, selfishness and unbelief, denies in advance the reconciling power of the gospel, must be considered ideology and false doctrine."
>
> The Belhar Confession (1986), article 3 · read it

Notice it doesn't say peoples aren't different. It says that using the gospel to keep them apart denies what the gospel does. And there were Christians against apartheid from the start. In 1956 the Anglican priest Trevor Huddleston told the world about the forced removals from Sophiatown in *Naught for Your Comfort* (read it). In 1963 Beyers Naudé, a Dutch Reformed minister, condemned apartheid from his own pulpit, left it, and was later banned (read it). Then in 1990 a leading Dutch Reformed theologian, Willie Jonker, stood up at a church conference at Rustenburg and confessed apartheid as sin, his own and, on their behalf, his church's and the Afrikaner people's. (The black leaders there answered with forgiveness, and with a reminder that confession goes with deeds.) As apartheid ended, church leaders helped build the National Peace Accord of 1991 (read it), and Archbishop Desmond Tutu led the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (read it).

In Germany in 1933, the "German Christians" movement, backed by the Nazis, took over much of the Protestant church, wanting a church that matched the nation and the race, and pressing to remove pastors of Jewish descent. In May 1934 other Christians met at Barmen and said no.

> "We reject the false doctrine that the Church could and should recognize as a source of its proclamation, beyond and besides this one Word of God, yet other events, powers, historic figures and truths as God's revelation."
>
> The Barmen Declaration (1934), thesis 1 · read it

(Its main author, Karl Barth, isn't someone evangelicals follow on everything. But on this, he and the Confessing Church were right, and many paid for it.) A year earlier, in April 1933, days after the boycott of Jewish shops, the young pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer had already written:

> "The church has an unconditional obligation toward the victims of any societal order, even if they do not belong to the Christian community." … "The third possibility is not just to bind up the wounds of the victims beneath the wheel but to seize the wheel itself."
>
> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "The Church and the Jewish Question" (1933), in *Berlin: 1932–1933* (trans. Isabel Best and David Higgins, 2009) · borrow it (free to borrow online)

His order matters: first ask the state whether what it's doing is right, then help its victims, Christian or not, and only when the state has stopped being a just state, act to stop it. Even this brave essay, scholars point out, still carries some of the old Christian prejudice against the Jewish people. (And watch out online: "Silence in the face of evil is itself evil" isn't Bonhoeffer's at all.) He was executed by the Nazis in April 1945.

The Confessing Church as a whole, though, was much slower than Bonhoeffer. Barmen's six theses didn't mention the Jews at all, and most of its leaders were mainly defending the church's own freedom (read it). After the war, the Protestant leaders confessed at Stuttgart: "we accuse ourselves for not witnessing more courageously, for not praying more faithfully, for not believing more joyously, and for not loving more ardently" (read it). Some Christians did far more. Around the French village of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, led by their Protestant pastors, people sheltered about 3,000 Jews (read it), and in the Netherlands Corrie ten Boom's family helped rescue hundreds (read it).

So when someone says "Christianity has always been about power", the answer has to be: sometimes, sadly, yes. Again and again, it's happened when the church got too close to a throne, a nation or a race. And again and again, some of the people who called it out were Christians too, using the Bible, and pointing back to a King who wouldn't let His followers fight for Him. And that's not the whole story either. The same faith cared for the sick and the poor, led the campaign to end the slave trade, and taught millions to read. If you're going to own the history, own all of it.

5. What goes wrong today

There are two opposite ways to get this wrong, and most of us lean towards one or the other.

Wrapping the cross in a flag

At the "Unite the Kingdom" march in London on 13 September 2025, part of the crowd was led from the stage in a chant of "Christ is King", and crosses were carried alongside flags. The Evangelical Alliance responded with real care:

> "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."
>
> Peter Lynas, Evangelical Alliance, "Christian nationalism in the UK: a contest for the nation's soul?" (23 September 2025) · read it

Notice who that's aimed at. Not the ordinary people on the march, many of whom feel ignored, worried about their towns or their kids' future, and some of whom are sincere Christians. It's aimed at an idea: that being Christian and being one kind of British are the same thing. Lynas puts the alternative perfectly: "not Christ is King as a political slogan, but Jesus is Lord as a radical reordering of allegiance". Jesus doesn't sign up to our side. We sign up to His.

Keeping Jesus out of public life

The opposite mistake is quieter, and probably more common in churches like ours. "Faith is a private matter." "Religion and politics don't mix." So Jesus gets Sunday, and the rest of the week runs on its own. Usually that comes from a good place: we don't want to push our faith on anyone, or turn church into a party. But if He really is King, He's King of how I vote, what I say about migrants at the school gate, how I treat the colleague whose politics I can't stand, and what I post online. The Lausanne Covenant says that people who receive Christ "are born again into his kingdom and must seek not only to exhibit but also to spread its righteousness in the midst of an unrighteous world." Not by force, and not by taking over. But not by hiding either.

And on either side of politics

It isn't only one end of politics that's tempted to recruit Jesus. "Jesus was a refugee" on a placard can be used to end a policy argument as if the Bible had written the bill, and church statements can sometimes sound like one party's manifesto with a verse attached. Christians on the left and on the right can both treat their own side's programme as if it were the kingdom of God, and the other side's voters as the enemy. The kingdom is bigger than any manifesto. And whoever's in power, the Bible still says pray for them (1 Timothy 2:1–2) and "Show proper respect to everyone" (1 Peter 2:17), which rules out a lot of what passes for political comment online. Newton again: "not to inflame".

6. Marches, flags and your neighbour

This is where most of us will actually meet it, so it gets its own section: a colleague holds up a video on their phone, a relative says something at Sunday lunch, a neighbour asks over the fence "Is that what church is now?"

> **The Bible**
> "When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, 'Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?' But Jesus turned and rebuked them." (Luke 9:54–55)

- **Listen first.** People come at this from very different places. One person is frightened by the marches and worried for a Muslim friend. Another thinks Christians should be shouting louder. Another has always thought of themselves as C of E and is quietly wondering what being a Christian really means. Ask what they make of it before you say what you think. "What did you think when you saw it?" often does more than a well-made argument.
- **Agree where you can.** It's fine to love your country, and it's fine to worry about how fast things are changing. Saying so isn't a betrayal of anything. You can say "yes, I get that" and still disagree about the rest.
- **Own the history.** If someone says "Christianity's always been about power", don't rush to defend it. "You're right, sometimes it has, and it's been awful when it has" is true, and saying it usually surprises people. Then you can say what the Christians who opposed it were pointing to, and mention the other side of the ledger too.
- **Then talk about the King.** The question isn't really "Is Christ King?" It's "What kind of King?" A King who rode a donkey, washed His friends' feet, and wore a crown of thorns. A King who died for His enemies, and that includes me, and who rose again and welcomes anyone, from any nation, who turns to Him. That's the bit people rarely hear, and it's good news for the person on the march, the person frightened by it, and everyone in between.

- **Pray for whoever's in charge.** Including the ones you'd never vote for. When Paul asked for prayers "for kings and all those in authority", the rulers of his day were, as John Calvin put it, "so many sworn enemies of Christ". His comment: "It is our duty, therefore, not only to pray for those who are already worthy, but we must pray to God that he may make bad men good" (read it). It's hard to stay furious with someone you're praying for.
- **Don't get drawn into party politics.** It's very easy to end up arguing about a politician or a policy and lose the person. As far as you can, keep pointing towards Jesus rather than scoring points. At work especially, be gentle, never mock anyone's views, and remember that a colleague's politics aren't yours to fix.
- **And be a good neighbour to everyone.** If you have Muslim or migrant neighbours or colleagues who are feeling nervous, a friendly word or a cup of tea says more about Christ the King than any banner. The same goes for the neighbour who feels their town has changed and nobody's listening: listen to them too. "Christians likewise love those that hate them," says the *Epistle to Diognetus* (read it). We can certainly manage it with people who don't.

7. Questions to think about

On your own, with a friend, or in a home group. There are no trick questions here.

1. "Our citizenship is in heaven" (Philippians 3:20). What difference does that make to how you feel about Britain? Does it make you love it less, or differently?
2. Romans 13 says rulers are "God's servant for your good"; Acts 5:29 says "We must obey God rather than human beings!" Can you think of a time when a Christian today might have to choose? What would help you decide?
3. Of the three views of church and government in section 3, which is closest to yours, and why? What would a Christian who holds a different one say to you?
4. Which part of the history surprised you most? How would you answer a friend who brought it up?
5. Where are you more tempted: to wrap the cross in a flag, or to keep Jesus out of public life altogether? What would it look like to resist that this week?
6. Who are the "strangers" in your workplace or street? What's one small thing you could do to welcome one of them?
7. If a friend asked you, "What do you mean when you say Christ is King?", what would you say in a couple of sentences?

8. Read next

The companion handout: *What kind of King? Hard questions* takes the questions that come up in the three conversations one at a time. Questions 1, 2, 4 and 6 go with this booklet: "Christ is King" at the marches, "Hasn't Christianity always been about power?", "I'm C of E", and "more bothered about them than us". Just ask whoever gave you this booklet if you'd like a copy.

Short reads (free online)

- Peter Lynas, "Christian nationalism in the UK: a contest for the nation's soul?" (Evangelical Alliance, about 10 minutes). Written ten days after the September 2025 march. Read it
- Jamie Sewell, "Flags, marches and 'Christ is King!'" (Premier Christianity, about 5 minutes). A vicar hears the chant through a frightened friend and through frustrated working-class men. Read it
- Christianity Explored, "Why are Christians such hypocrites?" (a 2-minute video). Watch it

Longer reads

- Evangelical Alliance, "Christianity and Nationalism in the UK" (about 12 minutes). Healthy patriotism, and where it goes wrong. Read it
- The Lausanne Covenant (1974), especially sections 5, 10 and 13. Short, and still very good. Read it

Books

- Glen Scrivener, *The Air We Breathe* (The Good Book Company). How Christianity shaped the values Britain still lives by. The Good Book Company
- John Dickson, *Bullies and Saints* (Zondervan). A look at the good and the evil in Christian history, Crusades included. Amazon UK
- Tim Keller, *King's Cross* (Hodder). The King who came to serve, through Mark's Gospel. 10ofthose

Scripture

> "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place." (John 18:36)

> "Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God." (Romans 13:1)

> "We must obey God rather than human beings!" (Acts 5:29)

> "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ," (Philippians 3:20)

Other passages worth reading: Psalm 2 · Psalm 72 · Jeremiah 29:4–7 · Daniel 3 · Zechariah 9:9–10 · Matthew 22:15–22 · Matthew 25:31–46 · Mark 10:42–45 · Luke 9:51–56 · Luke 10:25–37 · John 18:33–38 · Acts 17:24–28 · Romans 13:1–7 · Ephesians 2:11–22 · Philippians 2:5–11 · Hebrews 11:13–16 · 1 Timothy 2:1–4 · 1 Peter 2:11–17 · Revelation 7:9–10

Appendix A: Where to get help

This booklet is mostly history and ideas, but the subject doesn't stay on paper. Marches, flags and arguments about who belongs can leave people frightened, angry or hurt. If that's you, or someone you know, here's where to turn. Print it, or pass it on.

If someone is in danger right now

- **999**, if someone is in immediate danger or a crime is happening.

If you or someone you know has been targeted because of race, religion or where they're from

- Report it to the police on 101, or online through True Vision, the police's hate crime reporting site. It's for everyone: Christians, Muslims, Jews, people of any faith or none, and anyone targeted because of their colour or nationality. GOV.UK explains the options. report-it.org.uk · gov.uk/report-hate-crime
- Some communities have their own services too, which can support you whether or not you go to the police: Tell MAMA for anti-Muslim hatred (0800 456 1226), and the Community Security Trust for antisemitism (0800 032 3263, any time). tellmamauk.org · cst.org.uk

If you're worried someone is being drawn into violent extremism or terrorism

- Whatever cause or faith it claims, including the kind that borrows Christian words: the ACT Early Support Line, 0800 011 3764, in confidence, any time. It's answered by specially trained counter-terrorism police officers, and a call can lead to a referral to Prevent, the government's programme for people at risk of being drawn into terrorism. Some people, including many in Muslim communities, have concerns about Prevent, so if you're unsure, talk it over first with the St John's clergy (below). If someone is in danger, call 999. actearly.uk

If you're a refugee or asylum seeker, or you're helping one

- **Migrant Help: 0808 8010 503.** A free asylum helpline. migranthelpuk.org
- **The Refugee Council**: its list of advice and support. refugeecouncil.org.uk/get-help
- **Welcome Churches**: a Christian network that helps local churches welcome refugees and helps new arrivals find a church. welcomechurches.org

If you think someone is being exploited or held in modern slavery

- **The Modern Slavery & Exploitation Helpline: 08000 121 700.** For now 8am to 6pm, every day. modernslaveryhelpline.org
- If someone is in danger, call 999.

If someone is being harmed, or you're worried about a child or an adult at risk

- **The St John's safeguarding lead**: details at stjohnswoking.uk/safeguarding.

If you're worried about changes where you live, and feel nobody's listening

- Your local councillor and MP are there to hear it, whatever your view. You can find them and write to them for free at writetothem.com. The St John's clergy will listen too (below).

If it's all got too much

- **Samaritans: 116 123.** Free, any time, day or night.
- **NHS 111 (the mental health option)**, or your GP.

If you'd like to talk it through in confidence

- **The St John's clergy** (through the church office or website), about faith, fear, anger, the history in these pages, or anything else. stjohnswoking.uk

Appendix B: A timeline

The people and events in this booklet, in order. The section where each one comes up is in brackets.

When	What happened
2nd century	The *Epistle to Diognetus*: Christians live in their own countries "simply as sojourners", and "do not destroy their offspring" (2, 4, 6)
About 197	Tertullian, *Apology*: Christians pray for the emperor and the empire (2)
About 212	Tertullian, *To Scapula*: "no part of religion to compel religion" (2)
Early 300s	Lactantius: religion is defended "not by putting to death, but by dying" (2)
313	Constantine and Licinius agree freedom of religion for Christians "and all others" (4)
About 356	Hosius of Córdoba tells the emperor to keep out of the church's affairs (4)
About 362	The emperor Julian complains that Christians support pagan poor as well as their own (4)
370s	Basil of Caesarea builds a "new city" for the poor and sick (4)
380	One form of Christianity becomes the empire's official religion, and other Christians are declared heretics (4)
About 391	Ambrose of Milan condemns Rome for expelling foreigners in a famine (2)
About 400	Chrysostom: when we welcome a stranger, we welcome Christ (2)
408	Augustine explains why he came to support penalties against the Donatists (4)
413–426	Augustine, *City of God*: the heavenly city calls citizens "out of all nations" (2)
600s–700s	Arab armies conquer Syria, Jerusalem, Egypt, North Africa and most of Spain. Christians live on under Muslim rule, at times in peace and at times not (4)
1009	The Caliph al-Hakim, who persecutes Christians and Jews alike, has the Church of the Holy Sepulchre torn down (it's later rebuilt) (4)
1071	The Seljuk Turks defeat the Byzantine army at Manzikert (4)
1095	The Byzantine emperor asks for help; Urban II calls the First Crusade (4)
1096	Crusading bands massacre Jewish communities in the Rhineland (4)
1099	Jerusalem falls, and many of its Muslim and Jewish inhabitants are slaughtered (4)
About 1130	Bernard of Clairvaux, *In Praise of the New Knighthood* (4)
1204	A crusade sacks Constantinople (4)
13th century	Thomas Aquinas on how Israel treated newcomers (3)
1523	Luther, *Temporal Authority*: "faith is a free act" (2, 4)
1527	The Schleitheim Confession; Felix Manz is drowned in Zürich (3, 4)
1553	Michael Servetus is burned in Geneva (4)
1554	Castellio and his friends publish a plea for religious liberty (4)
1559	Calvin's *Institutes* in its final form (2, 4)
1570	The Pope declares Elizabeth I deposed (4)
From 1585	English law treats Catholic priests as traitors (4)
1598	James VI, *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies*: the divine right of kings (4)
1644	Samuel Rutherford, *Lex, Rex*; Roger Williams, *The Bloudy Tenent* (3, 4)
1646	The Westminster Confession tells rulers to suppress heresy (4)
1667	John Owen: violence in religion is "the shame and stain of Christianity" (4)
1678	Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (2)

1751	Whitefield defends slavery (4)
1759	Olaudah Equiano is baptised in Westminster (4)
1781	John Newton's fast-day sermon: "not to accuse others, but to confess our own sins" (2)
1783	Quakers send Parliament the first petition against the slave trade (4)
1787	The committee to abolish the slave trade is founded (4)
1788	American Presbyterians revise the Westminster Confession: rulers are not to "interfere in matters of faith" (3, 4)
1789	Equiano's book is published (4)
1791	Wesley writes to Wilberforce, days before he dies (4)
1797	Wilberforce, *A Practical View of Christianity* (2, 4)
1831–32	Sam Sharpe, a Baptist deacon, leads a strike in Jamaica that becomes an uprising, and is hanged (4)
1833	The Slavery Abolition Act, with £20 million to the slave-owners and nothing to the enslaved. Simeon's *Horae Homileticae* is published (1, 2, 4)
1877	Spurgeon, "Ecce Rex" (2)
1891	Kuyper speaks at the First Christian Social Congress, on the poor (3)
1898	Kuyper's *Lectures on Calvinism*: the state isn't to judge in matters of faith, but also a ranking of the races (3, 4)
1903	Calvin's heirs put up a monument where Servetus died (4)
1933	The "German Christians" take over much of the Protestant church. Bonhoeffer, "The Church and the Jewish Question" (4)
1934	The Barmen Declaration (4)
1940–44	During the Holocaust, Le Chambon-sur-Lignon and the ten Boom family shelter Jews (4)
1945	Bonhoeffer is executed. The Stuttgart confession of guilt (4)
From 1948	Apartheid in South Africa. The white Dutch Reformed Church gives it a biblical justification (4)
1956	Trevor Huddleston, *Naught for Your Comfort* (4)
1963	Beyers Naudé condemns apartheid from his own pulpit (4)
1974	The Lausanne Covenant (2, 3, 4, 5, 8)
1982	The World Alliance of Reformed Churches declares apartheid a sin; the Belhar Confession is begun (4)
1986	The Belhar Confession is adopted (4)
1990	Willie Jonker confesses apartheid as sin at Rustenburg (4)
1991	The National Peace Accord in South Africa (4)
1993	The Anglican Church of Canada apologises for the residential schools (4)
2001	John Paul II expresses "deep regret" for the sack of Constantinople (4)
2012	A major study finds Protestant missionaries were "a crucial catalyst" for education and democracy (4)
2023	The Church Commissioners say they are "deeply sorry" for links with the slave trade (4)
September 2025	The "Unite the Kingdom" march; the Evangelical Alliance responds (5, 8)

Notes

Every quotation in this booklet has been checked word for word against its source. These notes say which edition or translation that is, and add a few details that didn't fit in the main text. The web addresses are in the Bibliography.

1. The big picture

Bible quotations are from the New International Version (Anglicised), checked on BibleGateway. Some verses are shortened; the full references are given so you can read them whole.

Charles Simeon (page 5). His words on when to obey God rather than rulers are from his sermon "Duty to Civil Governors", on Romans 13:1–7, in *Horae Homileticae*, volume XV (1833).

2. In their own words

Diognetus, Tertullian, Lactantius, Ambrose, Chrysostom and Augustine (page 7). These are quoted from the Victorian translations in the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* and the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, on New Advent. The Ambrose passage is from *On the Duties of the Clergy*, book III, chapter 7, and Chrysostom's from his Homily 45 on Acts.

Luther (page 9). *Temporal Authority* is quoted from the English translation in the American edition of *Luther's Works*, volume 45, as reproduced by the University of Oregon. The words about the world being "un-Christian, even if they are all baptized" are in the same work.

Calvin (page 9). The *Institutes* are quoted from Henry Beveridge's translation (1845).

Bunyan (page 9). *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Part I, at Vanity Fair, from the Project Gutenberg text.

John Newton (page 9). The sermon was preached at St Mary Woolnoth, London, on the general fast day, 21 February 1781, on Jeremiah 5:29. It's in his *Works* (New York, 1851), volume II.

Wilberforce (page 9). *A Practical View* (1797), chapter IV, section V.

Simeon (page 10). "Christ's Good Confession" is in volume XIV of *Horae Homileticae* (1833).

Spurgeon (page 10). "Ecce Rex", Sermon 1353, on John 19:14, preached on 6 May 1877, in the *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, volume 23.

The Lausanne Covenant (page 10). Drawn up at the International Congress on World Evangelization in Lausanne, Switzerland, in July 1974.

3. Where Christians see it differently

Kuyper (page 11). "Not a square inch" is from his speech "Sphere Sovereignty", given when the Free University of Amsterdam opened on 20 October 1880, in James Bratt's translation, quoted by Wes Bredenhof. "The government bears the sword which wounds" and "A free Church in a free State" are from his third *Lecture on Calvinism*, given at Princeton in 1898. *The Problem of Poverty* is the English title of his 1891 address.

The Schleitheim Confession (page 11). The Confession (1527) is quoted from John C. Wenger's translation (1945). Its chief author, Michael Sattler, was executed the same year.

Roger Williams (page 12). *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution for Cause of Conscience* (1644), from its opening list of propositions.

The Westminster Confession (page 12). The 1788 American revision of chapter XXIII is quoted from the Orthodox Presbyterian Church's text. The "nursing fathers" sentence goes on to ask rulers to protect the church "without giving the preference to any denomination of Christians above the rest".

Isaac Watts (page 13). Psalm 67 in *The Psalms of David Imitated in the Language of the New Testament* (1719), from the Project Gutenberg text.

Aquinas (page 14). *Summa Theologiae* I-II, question 105, article 3, in the English Dominican translation, on New Advent.

Calvin on neighbours (page 14). His commentary on Leviticus 19:18, in his *Harmony of the Law*, translated by Charles Bingham for the Calvin Translation Society.

The Evangelical Alliance on immigration (page 14). From Peter Lynas's article of 23 September 2025 (see section 5).

4. The history, good and bad

Constantine and Licinius (page 15). Their agreement of 313, often called the "Edict of Milan", is quoted from Lactantius, *Of the Manner in Which the Persecutors Died*, chapter 48.

Basil and Julian (page 15). Gregory of Nazianzus called Basil's foundation "the new city" in his funeral speech for Basil (*Oration* 43). Julian's complaint is in his letter to Arsacius, a pagan high priest, in Wilmer Cave Wright's translation (1923).

Hosius (page 15). His letter to Constantius is preserved by Athanasius in his *History of the Arians*, section 44.

Augustine (page 15). Letter 93 was written to Vincentius in 408.

The Crusades (page 16). Urban II's letter to Flanders and Raymond of Aguilers's account are in August C. Krey's translation, *The First Crusade* (1921). Bernard of Clairvaux is quoted from Conrad Greenia's translation (1977), which is still in copyright, so only a short phrase is used. Albert of Aachen's account of the Rhineland massacres is in his *History of the Expedition to Jerusalem*, book I. John Paul II spoke about 1204 when he met the Archbishop of Athens on 4 May 2001.

The Reformers (page 17). Calvin's words on rulers' duty are in *Institutes* IV.20.3. The story of Servetus, the effigy, the Swiss churches' support for Geneva, Castellio, and the drowning of Felix Manz are all told in Philip Schaff's *History of the Christian Church*, volume VIII. The 1903 monument's English wording is given by the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. The 1646 Westminster Confession is quoted from chapter XXIII, section III.

John Owen (page 17). *Indulgence and Toleration Considered* (1667). Owen argued mainly for the freedom of Protestant Dissenters, and he set limits to it, so his view isn't quite modern religious freedom.

James VI and Rutherford (page 18). *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies* is quoted in its original spelling, from the constitution.org transcription. Rutherford's words are from *Lex, Rex*, questions XXVI and XXII. *Regnans in Excelsis* was issued by Pope Pius V in 1570. The two Catholic Encyclopedia articles are on the penal laws and on the English Catholic martyrs.

Whitefield (page 19). His letter of 22 March 1751 is in his *Works* (London, 1771), volume II.

Wesley (page 19). *Thoughts upon Slavery* was first published in 1774; the words quoted are from the Project Gutenberg text of a later edition. His letter to Wilberforce is dated 24 February 1791, and Wesley died on 2 March.

Wilberforce and "the lower orders" (page 19). *A Practical View*, chapter VI.

Kuyper and Noah's sons (page 19). The first of his *Lectures on Calvinism* (1898).

The Church of England and slavery (page 19). The SPG's plantations were the Codrington estates in Barbados. The Church Commissioners published their report in 2023.

Abolition (page 19). Equiano's book is *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789). Sam Sharpe was hanged in Montego Bay on 23 May 1832.

Missions (page 19). The Lausanne Covenant's words are in section 10. The 1993 apology was made by Archbishop Michael Peers, Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, on 6 August 1993. The 2012 study is Robert Woodberry's "The Missionary Roots of Liberal Democracy", in the *American Political Science Review*.

South Africa (page 20). The Belhar Confession is quoted from the translation published by the Reformed Church in America. The World Alliance of Reformed Churches met in Ottawa in August 1982. Willie Jonker spoke at the Rustenburg conference in November 1990.

Germany (page 20). The Barmen Declaration is quoted from the translation published by the United Church of Christ. Bonhoeffer's essay is in volume 12 of the English edition of his works, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*. The Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt is dated 19 October 1945.

5. What goes wrong today

The Lausanne Covenant (page 23). Its words on spreading the kingdom's righteousness are in section 5, "Christian Social Responsibility".

6. Marches, flags and your neighbour

Calvin on praying for rulers (page 25). From his commentary on 1 Timothy 2, in William Pringle's translation for the Calvin Translation Society.

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Glossary

Some of the words in this booklet, in plain English. Where Christians, or people on different sides of politics, use a word in different ways, the main ways are given.

Anabaptists (page 11). Christians of the 1500s who baptised only believers (so they "re-baptised" adults who had been baptised as babies) and wanted a church free of the state. Most were peaceful. Mennonites and Amish come from them, and Baptists share some of their convictions.

Apartheid (page 19). Afrikaans for "apartness": the system of racial segregation in South Africa from 1948 to the early 1990s, which kept people apart by race in where they lived, worked, studied and worshipped.

Byzantine Empire (page 16). The eastern half of the Roman Empire, which went on for nearly a thousand years after the west fell, with its capital at Constantinople (now Istanbul).

Christian nationalism (page 13). In this booklet, treating being Christian and belonging to one nation, people or political movement as if they were the same thing (section 3). The phrase is used loosely. Some people who use it of themselves mean only that a nation should honour God publicly; some critics use it of almost any Christian in politics. Both are different from the narrower sense used here.

Christ is King (page 5). A true Christian confession (Matthew 28:18). Lately it has also been used as a chant at marches and online, by people meaning very different things.

Coloured (page 20). Under apartheid, the legal name for South Africans of mixed descent. Many in South Africa still use it of themselves; in Britain it's offensive.

Confessing Church (page 21). The German Protestants who refused to accept the Nazi-backed "German Christians", and who made the Barmen Declaration in 1934.

Confession (of faith) (page 10). A church's formal statement of what it believes, such as the Westminster Confession or the Belhar Confession.

Crusades (page 16). Armed expeditions, called by popes from 1095 onwards, to take (or, as they saw it, win back) or defend Jerusalem and other lands, and later against other enemies of the church. Historians still argue about how far they were defensive and how far they were wars of conquest.

Divine right of kings (page 18). The belief, set out most famously in Britain by James VI, that a king's authority comes straight from God, so that he answers to God alone and his subjects may never resist him. Its supporters read it in Romans 13 and saw it as a defence against chaos and against popes deposing kings. Its critics, like Samuel Rutherford, answered from the Bible that the king is under God's law too.

Donatists (page 15). A breakaway church in North Africa in the 300s and 400s, which refused to accept clergy who had handed over the Scriptures or otherwise given way under persecution, and rebaptised those who joined them.

Established church (page 12). A church with a formal link to the state. The Church of England is established: the monarch is its Supreme Governor, and some of its bishops sit in the House of Lords.

Evangelical (page 5). A Christian who holds to four things: the Bible as God's word, each person's need to turn to Christ, the cross at the centre, and sharing the good news. Evangelicals are found in many denominations, the Church of England included. In the news, especially in America, the word is often used for a block of voters. That isn't how it's used here.

Free churches (page 11). Protestant churches that aren't established, such as Baptists, Methodists and independent churches.

German Christians (page 20). A movement in the German Protestant church, backed by the Nazis from 1933, that wanted a church fitted to the nation and the race.

Heresy (page 17). Teaching that contradicts a central truth of the Christian faith. For centuries it was also treated as a crime, which is how Servetus came to be burned (section 4).

Idolatry (page 6). Giving to anything (a thing, a person, a nation) the love and loyalty that belong to God alone.

Kingdom of God (page 23). God's rule, seen in Jesus and His people now, and coming in fullness when He returns. Jesus says His kingdom is "not of this world" (John 18:36): it doesn't come from this world or by force, but it reaches into every part of life (section 5).

Magistrate (page 11). An old word for anyone who holds public office: a ruler, a judge or an official.

Nationalism (page 12). Very broadly, the belief that a nation should govern itself and that loyalty to it matters a great deal. For some it means little more than patriotism; for others it means putting the nation above everything. It's the second that this booklet warns about. In Britain it can also mean wanting Scotland or Wales to be independent, which isn't what this booklet is about.

Patriotism (page 22). Love of your own country. This booklet treats it as a good thing (section 1, "Love your country; don't worship it"), which goes wrong only when the nation gets the loyalty that belongs to Christ.

Penance (page 16). Turning from sin, and the acts done to show it. In the Catholic Church it's also the name of a sacrament (confession, now often called reconciliation), where the priest sets an act of penance; Catholic teaching is that Christ alone has paid for sin. In the Middle Ages going on crusade came to count as a penance, and many crusaders heard it as earning forgiveness (section 4).

Pilgrims and sojourners (page 7). People living somewhere that isn't their final home. Some Bible translations use these words of Christians in this world (1 Peter 2:11, where the NIV has "foreigners and exiles"), and so do the *Epistle to Diognetus* and Bunyan (section 2).

Prevent (page 5). The government's programme for supporting people at risk of being drawn into terrorism. Some, including many Muslims, have concerns about how it works (Appendix A).

Quakers (page 19). The Religious Society of Friends, a Christian movement begun in England in the 1650s, known for silent worship, peace-making and the campaign against slavery.

Reformation (page 9). The movement in the 1500s, led by Luther, Calvin and others, that, as Protestants see it, called the church back to the Bible and to salvation by grace through faith, and that gave rise to the Protestant churches.

Sphere sovereignty (page 11). Kuyper's idea that each part of life (family, church, state, business, education, the arts) has its own God-given task and authority under Christ, so none should take over the others.

Supreme Governor (page 12). The monarch's title in the Church of England. Elizabeth I took it in 1559 in place of Henry VIII's "Supreme Head", and the Church of England holds that Christ alone is the head of the church. It gives the monarch a part in governing the church, not in its teaching or sacraments (Article 37 of the Thirty-Nine Articles).

Truth and Reconciliation Commission (page 20). The body set up in South Africa after apartheid to hear what had happened, from victims and perpetrators, and to offer amnesty to those who told the whole truth about political crimes.

Two kingdoms (page 9). Luther's teaching that God rules the world in two ways: through government, with the sword, for order and justice; and through the church, with the word, for salvation (section 3).

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> "After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb ..."
>
> Revelation 7:9

St John's Church, Woking

Workplace & Neighbourhood Evangelism

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