

Debate Pack
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Easter, Christian culture and heritage

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1 Background

On Thursday 21 March 2024 there will be a Westminster Hall debate on the topic of 'Easter, Christian culture and heritage'. The debate will be opened by Nick Fletcher MP.

On making the application, Nick Fletcher MP said:

This would be the third in the series of debates that I have had. The Committee granted me a similar debate last Easter, and it also granted me a Christmas debate last year. Both debates were well attended, and the numbers on the application have increased. There is an awful lot of interest: the first debate went on YouTube and was seen over 200,000 times across the world. This is a subject that is extremely important to me and to many people in this House and across the country. Christianity has played a huge part in our history and continues to do so. We should all reflect on it, especially at certain times of year that are very important to the Christian calendar.¹

1.1 The Christian Population in the UK

Figures on the population by religion are available from the 2011 and 2021 Censuses. The religion question is voluntary. A person's religion is self-defined regardless of whether they practise their religion or not.

Christian population in England and Wales

2021 Census results showed that the proportion of the population that identified as Christian in England and Wales fell from 59% in 2011 to 46% in 2021.²

The North West of England had the highest proportion of people who declared themselves to be Christian (53%). The lowest proportion was to be found in London (41%).

The Commons Library has produced a [dashboard](#) with Census figures for 2021 by constituency and neighbourhood. It also provides figures from the 2011 Census.

¹ Backbench Business Committee, [Representations: Backbench Debates 20 February 2024](#)

² ONS, [Religion, England and Wales: Census 2021](#)

Christian population in Northern Ireland

Figures from the 2021 Census in Northern Ireland showed that the proportion of people identifying as Christian (Roman Catholic, Protestant and other Christian) was 89.2% of which 45.7% were Roman Catholic. The figure in 2011 was 93.5%. Since 2011, the proportion identifying as Roman Catholic has remained relatively unchanged (45.1% in 2011 v 45.7% in 2022). The proportion identifying with other Christian denominations has fallen from 48.4% in 2011 to 43.5% in 2023.³

Christian population in Scotland

Figures from the 2022 Census in Scotland on religion will not be published until 2024. Figures from the 2011 Census showed that 54% of people identify as being Church of Scotland, Roman Catholic or another Christian based faith; this is down from 65% in 2001.⁴

1.2

Church Attendance in England and Scotland

[Church attendance statistics](#) are produced by the [Brierly Consultancy](#). Among the statistics gathered are church attendance on a Sunday by denomination in England and Scotland from 1980 to 2020, with projected attendance for 2025 and 2030.

The figures show that between 1980 and 2020, church attendance in Scotland has declined more steeply than in England though the proportion of the population attending church in Scotland was higher. The number of people attending church has fallen by 59% in Scotland compared with 38% in England. In 1980, 17% of the population attended church on Sunday in Scotland which fell to 7% in 2020. In England, during the same period the proportion of the population attending church fell from 10% to 5%.⁵

³ NISRA, [Census 2021 Main statistics for Northern Ireland Statistical bulletin, Religion](#), September 2022, p8

⁴ [Scotland Census Data Explorer](#)

⁵ [Brierley Consultancy, UK Church Statistics No 4: 2021 Edition](#), Tables 13.3.1 & 13.3.2

2

Parliamentary materials

Church of England: Schools

12 Sep 2023 | 195517

Asked by: Julian Knight

To ask the Member for South West Bedfordshire, representing the Church Commissioners, what steps the Church is taking to collaborate with local schools and educational institutions to promote positive values and to engage with students and educators.

Answering member: Andrew Selous | **Department:** Church Commissioners

Church of England schools are community schools educating over a million children a day. As a community school in many parts of the country, particularly our major cities, this means the majority of pupils are from non-Christian backgrounds, from other faith communities and from global majority ethnic backgrounds. All Church of England schools follow the national curriculum and also the Church of England's vision for education, prioritising education of the whole child and promoting the spiritual, intellectual and emotional resources needed to live a good life. The vision for education encourages the development of the skills of wisdom, hope, community and respect; fostering a society where people can work together and have an understanding of British values, democracy, rule of law and the dignity of the human person. More details about this vision and the church schools can be found here: <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/education-and-schools>

Awards of nearly £13 million have been made for dioceses to help churches support more children, young people and families. The grants from the Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board of the Archbishops' Council will revitalise parishes and start new congregations. The investments build on already successful projects to create new congregations and reach children and young people in areas including Bolton, Bournemouth, Guildford, Southampton and Wakefield. More information is available here: [Church of England announces £13 million of grants to reach children, youth and families | The Church of England](#)

Christianity in Society

Westminster Hall debate

30 March 2023

Nick Fletcher

The Church and Christianity, and the interpretation of the Bible, have been in the news more than normal as of late. Recently, the census showed that fewer people identify as Christian. The Church of England has been debating well-known ethical teaching that is now considered controversial in a liberal, modern United Kingdom. Many institutions seem to want to erase any references to their Christian heritage. The London School of Economics recently stated that it would be dropping Easter, Christmas and Michaelmas from its academic calendar. This Easter, the giant bunny will no doubt return to my Westminster hotel lobby, but I am sure there will be no sign of a cross.

In conversations everywhere, the Lord's name is taken in vain and no one bats an eyelid. Rainbows were long understood to represent God's promise to never again flood the Earth, but I wonder how many people are even aware of that now. Religious literacy has been declining for decades. Every Christmas and Easter, the newspapers will report some new poll showing that fewer and fewer people understand even the most basic claims of the Christian faith, and the basic historical and legal facts about our Christian heritage and constitution are receding from our collective cultural understanding. The question is, does it matter? I want to suggest two reasons why it does: first, for constitutional and cultural reasons; and secondly, from a faith point of view.

Throughout British history, the Christian Church has pioneered some of the most profound and positive social changes ever to bless these islands. Here, as in many other parts of the world, Christians led the way with universal education and healthcare. As the historian Tom Holland and many others have recognised, so many of the laws and values that we now take for granted have their roots firmly in the Christian faith. It was the biblical idea of God as the ultimate law giver that underpinned the Magna Carta, providing the foundation stone of individual freedom and establishing the principle that no one—not even the King—is above the law.

[Christmas, Christianity and Communities](#)

Westminster Hall debate

19 December 2023

Nick Fletcher

Jesus was visited by those deemed the lowest in society—the shepherds—and by the highest, the wise men. He was raised as all boys were at that time. Jesus would have gone through many of the challenges we all face but always in the knowledge of His heavenly father. He had siblings. He learnt a trade from His father, Joseph, a carpenter, but then,

in His 30s, He started to spread the word about His reason for being here. He carried out miracles and preached as no one had before or ever will again. He told the world that the only way to be right with the Lord and have eternal life was to believe in Him. He knew His time was limited on this earth and that He would have to make the ultimate sacrifice for all of us. He knew he would be crucified, and He was—crucified so that all those who believe in Him will be forgiven. He made the final sacrifice so that we can be right with our maker, not through words or deeds but simply by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

What does that mean to us, 2,000 years later? It means simply this: if we repent and ask Christ to come into our lives, He will. That is it: the greatest gift we can ever be given is simply an ask away. It does not matter what you have done in the past. No matter what your thoughts or deeds have been, what addiction you have, whether you are in prison or not, or whether you are wealthy or broke or healthy or sick, just ask Him to come into your life, and He will. You can ask Him alone or with others, in church or not, on your knees or not, eyes closed or not. You just need to ask, and there is never a better time than now.

Do not think that you are not good enough to ask—that is what I thought. I lived for decades without the Lord because I thought I was not good enough to be a Christian. Trust me, you will never not be good enough and nor will I. Forget all your reservations and just ask, and when you do, you will start watching the negatives in your life fall away. Why? Because you will fill all those voids in your life—the ones you have filled with poor choices—with the truth that our Lord, Jesus Christ, loves you. From that moment forward, you will never be alone and will never be without help or hope, because our Lord is always with us.

I have spent much time this year talking about suicide. Two of the many issues related to that are loneliness and the feeling of having no value. With Christ in your life, you are never alone and you can be happy in the knowledge that the Lord values you. What a wonderful gift that is. We really need to spread this message.

The next thing you need to do is to let people know and to seek out your local church. The Church was always at the heart of the community. Sadly, some churches are closing. I often speak about building a strong local economy. If we all buy online, there will be no shops. Likewise, if we do not go to our local churches, they will inevitably close. At Easter, I spoke about the importance of our Christian heritage and about the wonderful chapels and churches that make our towns and villages the places that they are. They are also home to a Christian community that is leaned on by many in society when a tragedy happens. Unless we go to those chapels and churches, they will no doubt close their doors, just like our shops have. So when you have decided to let Christ into your life, if you were not already in church when that happened, go down to your local church and tell them of your decision—they will be delighted to see you. There is a church community out there that is just waiting to

welcome you: a community that is full of forgiveness and care, love and hope—a community that needs you.

This Christmas, make that decision to follow Christ and then become part of that community, which can change our society as a whole. We were never meant to be alone. We were meant to be in families and in a community, with faith at the centre of our lives. I hope that all Members agree with that, and I hope that the Minister will do all that he can to promote our communities and our churches.

This wonderful gift of forgiveness and eternal life was given to us at Christmas, and it is a gift that we must share. But we must also engage in the forgiveness part. If there is one thing that we can and should do as Christians, more than anything else, it is to forgive those who have wronged us. This place is meant to reflect society and, although that is often a good thing, sadly it also reflects the bad in society: anger at each other, gossip and lies, selfishness and attempts to get ahead. We can all be guilty of some, if not all of those. If God can send His only son for Him to eventually die on a cross for our sins, we surely must be able to forgive an act or deed against us. If you are upset with mum this Christmas, give her a call; if you are not speaking with a sibling, send them a card; if a neighbour is not currently on your Christmas card list, go and knock on their door; and if an argument with a friend has turned into six months of silence, send them a text.

Let me be the first to practise what I preach. Let me start by apologising to all those I have let down over this past year—families, friends, colleagues, the good people of this country and the Christians who think I should do better or differently. Trust me, this place can make you look like a villain even when you are not, but if I apologise here and now, hopefully you can all forgive me.

I say now that I have already forgiven those who have wronged me, especially those on social media. They call me the most awful things, Dame Maria, but trust me, I forgive them all. Why? Because God has forgiven me. What would Christmas be without forgiveness, friends, family and Christ in the centre of our communities? Happy Christmas, everyone.

3

Press

[Easter is about Christianity, not dinosaurs or cavapoo](#)

The Telegraph

7 April 2023

[We should be proud of our Christian heritage. It would be a disaster to lose it](#)

Premier Christianity

30 March 2023

[UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak says Christian values are 'British values' in Easter message](#)

The National News

8 April 2023

['Today's Christian culture is trying to purge itself of Christianity'](#)

The Telegraph

14 August 2023

4

Further reading

The Church of England on [Building Relationships](#). The Church of England is committed to visible unity among Christians as well as mutual understanding and cooperation for the common good between Christians and people of other religions and worldviews. We believe that by working with other Churches and faiths, we can have a greater impact in our communities and on society as a whole.

[The Archbishops' Council](#)

The Archbishops' Council was established in 1999. The Council is a charity, set up in law to co-ordinate, promote, aid and further the work and mission of the Church of England. It does this by providing national support to the Church in dioceses and locally, working closely with the House of Bishops and other bodies of the Church. The Archbishops' Council is one of the seven National Church Institutions.

[Christian Unity](#)

The Catholic Church Bishops Conference of England and Wales Unity among all Christians is a key concern for the Catholic Church. Ecumenism, unity or cooperation with other Christian churches, is about healing and forgiving so we can all work together as a united witness to our shared faith in Christ.

[The relationship between church and state in the United Kingdom](#)

Commons Library Briefing

This relationship takes different forms in England and in Scotland. While the King is “Supreme Governor” of the Church of England, he is an ordinary member of the Church of Scotland. Anglican bishops are members of the House of Lords, but there is no place as of right for the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. And while Church of England Measures (laws) require parliamentary oversight, the Church of Scotland is entirely self-governing.

Historically, establishment was opposed in parts of the UK where most of the population were not Anglican. As a result of political and religious pressure, the church was disestablished in Ireland in 1871 and Wales in 1920.

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