

# Danny Kruger, Christian values, and the dangers of thin religion

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*This article first appeared on Seen and Unseen - [www.seenandunseen.com](http://www.seenandunseen.com) - (6 August 2025) and is reproduced by kind permission of the editors.*

In case you hadn't noticed, a speech given to an audience of about seven people in a sparse House of Commons in July 2025 went viral. Danny Kruger's call for a Christian restoration in the UK has generated a lot of attention.

I've noticed two distinct responses to it. On one side, there are three (or more) cheers for Danny. He has been interviewed at Christian festivals, lauded for a brave, deeply considered and soulful appeal to the Christian heritage of the nation. He has been thinking deeply about this for some time, as demonstrated in his book *Covenant*, sometimes seen as a manifesto for a renewed Conservatism based around the claims of family, community and nation, and summarised in this *Seen & Unseen* article.<sup>1</sup> As one of the most prominent voices against the recent bills to permit assisted dying and the termination of full-term embryos, he is clearly reeling from the impact of these devastating recent votes in the Commons that, more than anything else, seem to demonstrate how far the nation has slipped its Christian moorings.

Yet it's not hard to stumble across another reaction. A former Bishop of Oxford called Kruger's claim that the UK was a Christian nation anachronistic and counter-productive. Others have pointed out that many Jews, Muslims or hardened atheists would not be delighted to be told that 'it is your church and you are its member.' Others question whether there can be such a thing as a 'Christian nation'.

Some have picked up on a darker side to all this. Recent riots outside hostels for immigrants in Rotherham and Norwich showed protesters carrying flags of St George, even brandishing a wooden cross. Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, *aka* Tommy Robinson, and Nigel Farage have recently been speaking much more openly about the 'Christian values' on which Britain is founded, and many on the extreme right seem to have latched onto Christianity as at the heart of what they see as a cultural, civilisational war. Kruger's talk of the gap left by Christianity's demise being filled by Islam and, what worries him more, a kind of 'wokeism' that blends 'ancient paganism, Christian heresies and the cult of modernism', sets up a stark opposition. He goes on: 'That religion, unlike Islam, must simply be destroyed, at least as a public doctrine. It must be banished from public life.' Does that language stray a bit too close to the aggressive language of more extreme voices on the right?

Now I have some sympathy with this. I have written before of how I also fear the pagan gods are making a return. Like Danny Kruger, I too believe the recent votes in the House of Commons are a dark and dangerous turn toward death not life. Yet I can't shake a nervous

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<sup>1</sup> Danny Kruger, 'Why we need a gentle radical revolution', *Seen & Unseen*, posted 12 January 2024, accessible at: [www.seenandunseen.com/why-we-need-gentle-radical-revolution](http://www.seenandunseen.com/why-we-need-gentle-radical-revolution)

feeling that, without some careful thought, we might be summoning up shades we might not be able to control.

The signs – and the solution - lie in the past. For centuries, Christianity, like all other religions, has been used as a weapon in civilisational wars. It happened in the Crusades of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries. It happened in the Balkan wars involving Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia in the 1990s and 2000. It happened in the ‘Troubles’ in Northern Ireland, where your neighbour being Protestant or Catholic was a reason to kill them.

Theologians and sociologists sometimes talk of ‘thick’ and ‘thin’ religion. ‘Thin’ religion is simply a badge of identity. It often blends religion, politics and nationalism and serves as a motivation to unite people around a cause, such as Hindu nationalism, Muslim victimhood, or Christian supremacy. It is religion seen purely as a label, a badge of tribal identity over against other religious identities, however deeply felt. It is often nostalgic, ranged against enemies who are determined to destroy it, denigrating those who are not part of the religion as less deserving of value. It sees the Christian god as one of many gods – our god – which we must fight for against other gods, rather than, as Christian theology has always taught, the one true God who sits above all other gods, the God of the whole earth. It is paradoxically a manifestation of the kind of the kind of culture that Danny Kruger hates: ‘a return to the pagan belief that your value is determined by your sex, race or tribe.’ Tommy Robinson’s faith seems as good an example of this as any. This is ‘thin’ religion.

‘Thick’ religion, however, is different. It is not just a badge of identity, but entails a set of distinct beliefs and practises. It means submitting yourself to the disciplines of the faith. In the Christian context, it is a belief in God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that Jesus is the Son of God, that he died for the sins of the world, rose again on the third day and will return one day to judge the living and the dead. It involves a serious attempt to live the Christian life, to love your neighbour, and even your enemy, helping the poor and vulnerable, praying regularly, being consistently present at church worship and so on.

Christian hymns have always had a fair amount of militant imagery, from ‘Onward Christian Soldiers’ to ‘Fight the Good Fight’, and more contemporary ones about God ‘fighting our battles’. Yet this has always meant a serious fight against enemies within – pride, greed, anger and spiritual lethargy. When it became focussed on human enemies, as it did in the Crusades, a line was crossed from ‘thick’ into ‘thin’ religion.

It's not always easy to tell the difference between those who adopt thick and thin Christianity. I propose a simple test. If someone advocates Christian values and regularly turns up at church, then they have a legitimate voice, and are worth a hearing. If they turn up weekly to hear the Bible being read, to take part in Holy Communion alongside other people, regardless of their ethnicity, wealth or background, pray regularly, then, we can assume, they are serious about it. They are submitting themselves to the discipline of learning Christian faith, seeking to love their neighbour and trying as hard as they can to love their enemies. They may fail from time to time but these are the signs of someone who has grasped the grace of God which is the heart of Christian faith. Danny Kruger passes that test. Tommy Robinson and Nigel Farage, as far as I know, don't.

If some shout loudly about Christian values, about the danger of losing the heritage of our civilization and yet show no interest in going to church, living the Christian life, praying or even trying to love their enemies, then we should take what they say with a large pinch of salt. They have no skin in the game.

When the heart of Christianity is hollowed out, it becomes moralism. It becomes the law not the gospel, as Martin Luther would say. The cross literally becomes a stick to beat others with. Paradoxically, it is only ‘thick’ religion that ends up founding and changing cultures. Early Christianity, the kind that converted the western world, was definitely ‘thick’ religion. It was not just a badge of identity. It had a whole set of distinct beliefs and practices that marked Christians off from the pagan world around them. It did not set out to advocate for political causes in the power corridors of Rome, build a Christian civilisation, lobby Caesar for ‘Christian laws’. It set out to produce people with ‘a sincere and pure devotion to Christ’ as St Paul put it, loving God, neighbour and enemy. And they changed the world by accident.

Thin religion is a dangerous thing. It uses religion as a tool for dominance and conflict. It makes sceptics think we need less religion in public life. Thick religion is good religion. It forms good people. It builds healthy societies. It’s the kind we need more of, not less.

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