

Why Atheists Should Be Grateful to Live in a Christian Nation

A *Daily Telegraph* columnist has defended David Cameron's comments that Britain is a Christian country and says atheists should be thankful they live in a Christian nation.

Tim Stanley is commenting in response to a letter to the newspaper from a group of atheists complaining about the prime minister's remarks.

Atheist Julian Baggini, writing in *The Guardian*, also defended Cameron's comments after he declined an invitation to co-sign the letter.

Baggini says, "There is a clear enough sense that Britain is a Christian country and we should just get on with it.

He adds, "There are indeed serious objections to be made against the expansion of religious schools, automatic seats in the House of Lords for bishops or increased involvement of faith groups in delivering state-sponsored public services.

"These are issues worth kicking up a fuss about, not the question of whether Britain is a Christian country or not."

Stanley argues that Christianity is "part of [the U.K.'s] cultural makeup" and upholds "the principle of freedom of conscience."

He questions why "militant atheists spend so much time worrying about something they don't believe in."

"Cameron's assertion that Britain is essentially Christian is a fact supported by the constitution, British history, Ed Miliband, the Hindu Council U.K. and the Muslim Council of

Britain,” he says.

“Of course, we’re not Christian in the sense that everyone attends church three or four times a week—but church attendance has been rising and falling since the 1500s and isn’t doing nearly as badly as you think. Either way, we’re Christian in the same sense that we’re Europeans. It’s a part of our cultural makeup,” he adds.

On Thursday, the archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, said, “It is a historical fact (perhaps unwelcome to some, but true) that our main systems of ethics, the way we do law and justice, the values of society, how we decide what is fair, the protection of the poor, and most of the way we look at society ... all have been shaped by and founded on Christianity.”

Writing on his personal blog, Welby added, however, that in terms of regular churchgoing alone, Britain is not a Christian country, although “some millions attend church services each week.”

In the letter to the *Daily Telegraph*, 55 public figures, including the popular author Philip Pullman, claimed the prime minister is fostering “alienation and division” by saying Britain is a Christian country.

The backlash came after Cameron commented that he was “proud of the fact that we are a Christian country” during a Downing Street Easter reception earlier this month.

Cameron also highlighted “the role that faith can play in helping people to have a moral code” in an article in the *Church Times*.