



Symbols as a weapon

# Christian nationalism as a driving force behind the far right in the Netherlands

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**Crosses at anti-asylum demonstrations. Crusader imagery on banners and clothing. Far-right Defend members joining neo-Templar orders. Across the Netherlands, Christian nationalist symbols are increasingly surfacing at far-right protests. This mirrors fast-growing developments that have long been visible in countries such as the US, the UK, Hungary and Poland.**

Stichting Justice for Prosperity (JfP) investigated how these narratives, alliances and symbols are infiltrating Dutch streets and online spaces, often framed as the defence of a "Christian (white) Europe" against migration and "multiculturalism". What is emerging is part of a broader transnational trend in which religious identity is deployed as a tool for exclusionary nationalism and the normalisation of far-right extremist ideology.

In April 2026, the "Raad van Kerken" ("Council of Churches", nineteen Dutch church denominations collectively representing approximately five million believers in the Netherlands) published a guidance document for churches: radical-right ideology is on the rise, including within faith communities in the Netherlands. The Council described it as "racist, antisemitic, a threat to democracy and the rule of law, and a threat to the Christian faith itself". The Council warned specifically against the instrumentalisation of cultural Christianity and its misuse as a marker of group identity. That, the Council wrote, "turns the Christian faith into an idol".

The Council's statement confirms what JfP has been investigating since 2021 and recently documented at protests against asylum seekers and asylum seeker centres (ASCs) across the Netherlands. Christian nationalism is carving out an increasingly visible presence on Dutch streets and in online spaces. As in many other countries where JfP has conducted research, this appears to be growing.

It is important to emphasise that most religious expression is not extremism. Faith communities are in fact often pillars of social cohesion and democratic resilience. This research is not about faith, but about its political instrumentalisation.

JfP investigates societal manipulation, and that includes these developments. Anti-rights mobilisation and anti-migration mobilisation are increasingly intertwined with broader international ideological ecosystems, often with a geopolitical dimension. Within these ecosystems, religion, culture and identity reinforce one another, combined with homophobia, xenophobia, demographic anxiety and narratives around the "natural" family. Also frequently surfacing in this context are the great replacement theory and calls for remigration (or deportation), two themes that have by now moved well beyond the fringes of the radical right.

Where we see this play out in the Netherlands is, among others, with the far-right Defend groups, which have spread rapidly across the country and grown from 2 to 35 groups in just a matter of months, [as earlier research by Pointer and JfP revealed](#). They travel to local communities to exert influence over asylum seeker centre placements and amplify their



message through open and closed online channels, in which antisemitism and glorification of Hitler appear regularly. They organise their own protests and join demonstrations that frequently escalate into violence, and do not shy away from anti-democratic means to undermine democratic processes. Their recent tactics and expressions, including symbols, gatherings and statements, increasingly display clear ideological parallels with Christian nationalist movements gaining momentum worldwide.



## **What is Christian nationalism?**

Christian nationalism is an ideology that fuses Christian identity with ethnic and cultural nationalism. It holds that the laws, institutions and demographic composition of a nation must reflect and protect a specifically Christian, and often ethnically white, civilisational order. The ideology has theocratic characteristics: not the democratic rule of law, but a Christian order is the ultimate goal. Its most militant variants are essentially fascist in nature: racial purity, threat from the outside, and a call for authoritarian restoration.

While an Islamic theocracy based on sharia law is immediately rejected and labelled as extremist, Christian nationalism is frequently presented as patriotism. That makes it harder to recognise for what it is.

The ideology advocates traditional gender roles and a family ideology in which the heterosexual family forms the cornerstone of Christian civilisation. At the same time, it lobbies for the restriction of rights for women, LGBTIQ+ communities and religious minorities. It differs from classical religious conservatism in that faith is no longer a personal conviction, but a benchmark for who truly belongs and who does not. Demographic anxiety translates in practice into great replacement rhetoric and calls for remigration (deportation). In its most extreme form, Christian nationalism seeks to establish a white Christian ethnostate.

## **Why JfP is publishing this now**

JfP is publishing this report now because the window for early intervention is closing. What began as marginal online activity has since made its way onto the streets, into local politics and, as developments in the United States for example show, even into the governing structures. The patterns we are documenting are not a warning about what might come. As with our earlier reporting on Identitair Verzet and Generation Identity, we are sounding the alarm early about something already in motion.

Prominent figures in the Dutch political landscape are now operating in this space. Gidi Markuszower recently spoke about "population replacement" at an anti-asylum protest in Loosdrecht. Lidewij de Vos of Forum for Democracy is set to speak at the upcoming "Remigration" summit in Porto alongside Martin Sellner. These patterns are already having a tangible effect in the Netherlands, and the entanglement of political leaders with extremist ideology is plain to see.

## **Christian symbolism at far-right protests: what JfP has documented**

JfP has identified a clear increase in Christian symbols and references in the mobilisation of far-right and anti-asylum groups in the Netherlands. These are being actively woven into nationalist narratives.

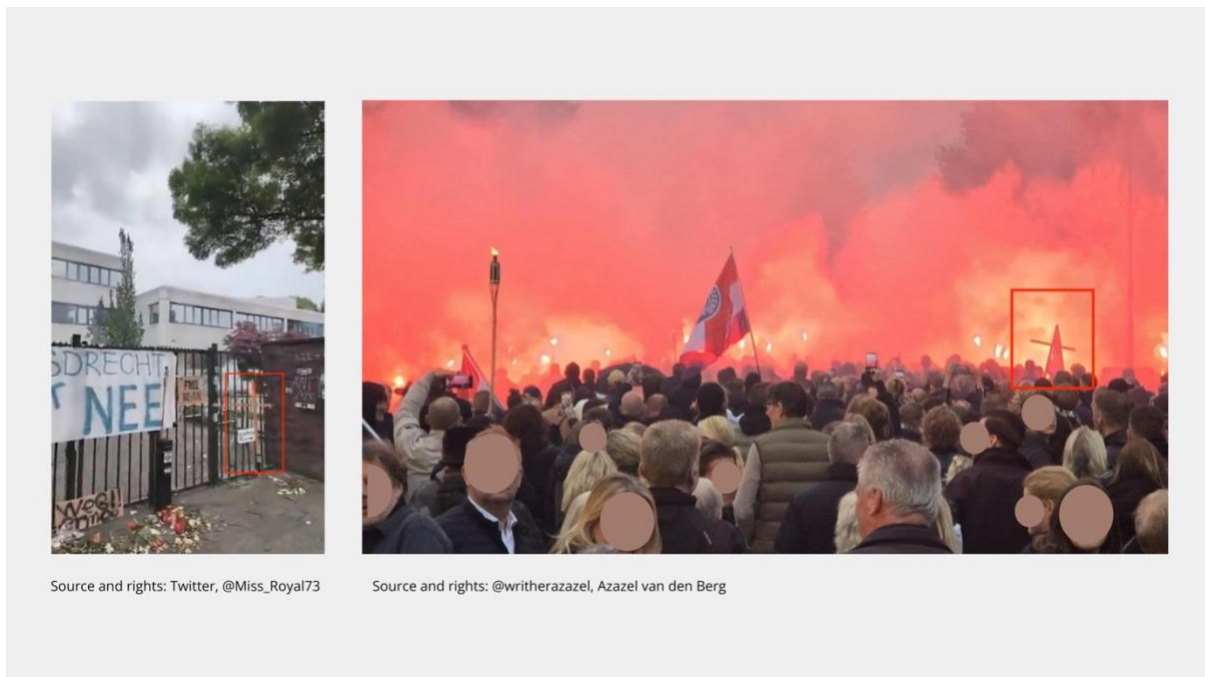
One example is organiser Els Noort, also known as Els Rechts, of the Malieveld anti-asylum demonstration on 20 September 2025. She opened the demonstration with a Bible verse from Psalm 4. In the crowd, a large wooden cross was visible bearing the words "God is good, Geert is great", amid waving Prince's flags.

Since the end of April 2026, residents of Loosdrecht have been demonstrating against the opening of an emergency shelter for asylum seekers. What began as local opposition to a



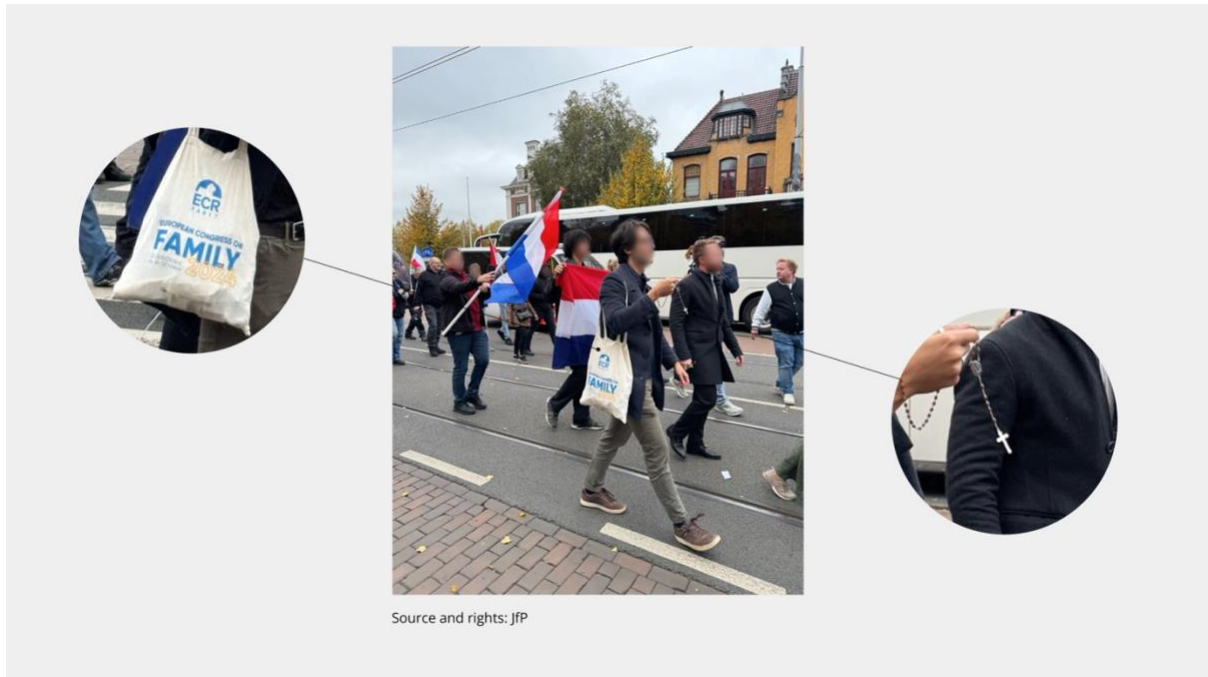
lack of public consultation quickly attracted extremist and far-right organisations from outside the area, including so-called Defend groups. The situation escalated into violence: the surroundings of the buildings were on set fire and the firefighters who arrived to put out the flames before they spread and make sure those inside were safe, were blocked from doing so.

JfP observed Christian crosses being carried in procession and placed in front of the emergency shelter. This fits patterns seen internationally as well: Christian symbolism is deployed as a criterion for who belongs to one's own civilisation, thereby normalising the ideals, rhetoric and actions of far right extremists.



In a similar vein, on 12 October 2025 a large anti-immigration demonstration took place in Amsterdam: "Nederland in Opstand" ("The Netherlands in Revolt"). Defend groups and members of church denominations participated, marching through the streets, chanting slogans and carrying flags and Christian crosses. Among the flags were the Prince's Flag, the former NSB flag, as well as Bibles.

JfP also identified a local party leader of the far-right political party Forum for Democracy (FvD) at the demonstration. Far-right extremism, Christian symbolism and anti-migration mobilisation are becoming visibly intertwined in the Netherlands.



In the image above, the local FvD party leader can be seen holding a rosary and carrying a bag from the ECR, the European Conservatives and Reformists in the European Parliament. The people around him are holding up crosses and Bibles. JfP also identified the T-shirt he was wearing: it bore the text "Defend Europe" and came from a nationalist clothing brand popular among right-wing extremists, members of so-called Active Clubs and white nationalists. The brand frequently features Christian messaging and Crusader and Templar symbolism. The ECR is a political group in the European Parliament that is broadly Eurosceptic, anti-federalist and right-wing, with far-right factions.

Public

The same FvD member was present at a New Year's gathering of Voorpost in Leiden in 2024, as platform Kafka established. Voorpost is an ethno-nationalist organisation that seeks the reunification of Flanders and the Netherlands and fights against migration and multiculturalism.

At that same gathering, Austrian far-right extremist Martin Sellner spoke. He is a key figure in the pan-European identitarian movement (more on Sellner later). Geuzenbond and Nouvelle Droite were also present at the event. Geuzenbond is a Dutch nationalist and far-right identitarian youth organisation designated as far-right by the NCTV. Nouvelle Droite is a French movement that frames ethno-nationalism and anti-egalitarianism within a cultural-philosophical framework.



Source and rights: Geuzenbond Telegram. Credits to Capitol Terrorists Exposers.



Templar and Crusader symbolism is being deliberately appropriated within Christian nationalist circles. Contemporary issues are thereby framed as a religious war in defence of white, Christian, European civilisation. JfP established that Dutch Defend groups are making increasing active use of this Templar symbolism and its associated narratives.



Source and rights: Defend Den Bosch Facebook page (AI-generated)

Since January 2026, Defend members have been joining OSMTH Netherlands (Ordo Supremus Militaris Templi Hierosolymitani, or the Supreme Military Order of the Temple of Jerusalem) in Den Bosch, an internationally operating, Christian-inspired order that seeks to honour the traditions of the medieval Knights Templar.

They attend religious ceremonies while simultaneously intensifying the online and offline dissemination of Christian messaging. Calling themselves "Warriors" is a deliberate nod to the Templar theme. JfP thus documented how Defend members leverage the respectability and medieval Christian symbolism of an established organisation.

This is a well-known tactic internationally: extremist networks use respected environments and symbolism or, as in Loosdrecht, the genuine concerns of ordinary citizens, to normalise extremist ideology.



Source and rights: OSMTH LinkedIn

12 March 2026, the photo shows several members of Defend Den Bosch during an OSMTH ceremony in which they are inducted into the Order.



Source and rights: Defend United, Defend Den Bosch Facebook page

Since their affiliation with OSMTH Netherlands, Defend members have begun engaging in visible charitable activities, such as distributing food and assisting the elderly. The images of these activities are (in part) produced using generative AI and widely disseminated. Whether the charitable work is genuine matters less than the effect and the pattern of an extremist group staking a claim to a Christian, respectable identity.

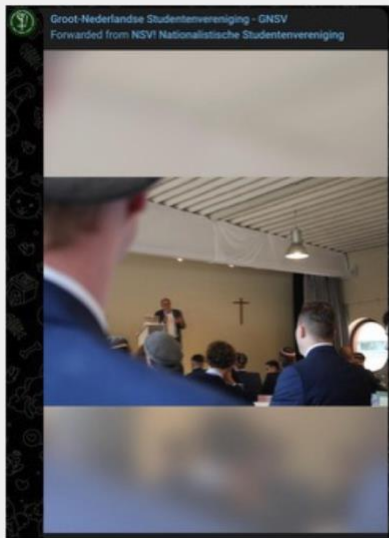


Source and rights: Defend United, Defend Den Bosch Facebook page (AI-generated)

JfP also documented direct links between Christian nationalism and suspected domestic terrorism in the Netherlands. The GNSV (Groot-Nederlandse Studentenvereniging) was founded in 2021 by members of Geuzenbond as the organisation's student association. Researcher Willem Wagenaar of the Anne Frank Foundation concluded that the two are effectively the same organisation. Thomas D., a member of the Nijmegen branch, was arrested in August 2025 on suspicion of preparing a terrorist attack. The arrest followed an official report by the AIVD, which indicated that the suspect was prepared to commit right-wing terrorist violence and was in possession of firearms. During a search of his home, police found prohibited weapons, ammunition and manuals for making explosives, tear gas and 3D-printable weapons. In February 2026 he was sentenced to two years in prison, one of which was suspended. The student's ideological views were taken into account in the verdict.

The GNSV simultaneously presents itself as Christian-inspired, as does its Flemish counterpart the NSV (Nationalistische Studentenvereniging). In September 2024 they organised an event in a church, and in May 2025 they attended a lecture entitled "What are the consequences of dechristianisation for our country?". The Nijmegen GNSV members also attended a lecture by Martin Sellner at KU Leuven, organised by the NSV. Within the GNSV, Christian profiling and far-right networking go hand in hand.





Source and rights: GNSV Telegram,  
Additional credit: Capitol Terrorists Exposers.



Source and rights: NRC

On 9 May 2026, Defend groups mobilised around 200 demonstrators for a march to the asylum seeker centre in Ter Apel, despite having officially withdrawn their protest notification days earlier. Anti-LGBTIQ+ logos were also visible, as shown above.

"Protect our children" (see image) is a central mobilising frame within Christian nationalist movements, positioning the heterosexual, Christian family as the building block of civilisation, with children as bearers of the future. In practice, it is deployed against LGBTIQ+ rights, visibility in schools and sex education, as a way of protecting children from "grooming" or "indoctrination". These alleged threats are framed as attacks on the Christian social order itself.

The Netherlands Freedom Fighters, a protest group affiliated with Defend and anti-asylum protests, disseminate similar messages on their Facebook page and present their actions as "protecting children". They too post imagery in Crusader style, projecting a sense of heroism and defence against the perceived threat posed by asylum seekers.



Source and rights: "Give children a safe future",  
Freedom Fighters Netherlands



Source and rights: Freedom Fighters Netherlands Facebook

### Evidence of a concerning global trend

JfP has been conducting this research worldwide over the past several years. This is not the first time JfP has documented the patterns described here. [Our research into](#) anti-rights movements in the Asia-Pacific region showed how religion was deployed as a tool to roll back human rights under the guise of a return to "traditional" life, with progressive ideology labelled as "maliciously modern", "foreign" or "imported".

JfP [documented](#) the same strategy in Africa in relation to the [Geneva Consensus Declaration \(GCD\)](#), a political declaration against abortion and in favour of the "traditional family". This was drawn up by the US State Department under Mike Pompeo, partly with funding from Gulf states. Domestic conservative networks were engaged to advance a transnational Christian agenda.

JfP also contributed to a documentary by [Zembla](#), in which international financial flows from American ultra-conservative and religious organisations such as Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) to Europe were mapped. These financial flows are used to undermine democratic rights and their protections.

Across all of this research, the same patterns emerge. Restrictive measures, polarising rhetoric and attacks on the rights of vulnerable communities, packaged in Christian narratives and symbolism: these are the recurring building blocks of the anti-rights ecosystem. [JfP's report](#) on corrosive polarisation further showed how financial and political incentives drive this dynamic.

The current advance of Christian nationalism within Dutch anti-asylum protest is the latest manifestation of that same ecosystem in action.



### **Christian nationalism outside the Netherlands**

Christian nationalism has recently found its most striking institutional foothold in the United States. The Heritage Foundation's "Project 2025", a policy blueprint for the conservative president, places American governance within a Christian civilisational framework and advocates for the dismantling of institutions deemed hostile to Christian and traditional family values. The scale and pace of implementation are what matter most. By mid-2026, [approximately half](#) of the proposals in Project 2025 are in effect. The "Seven Mountains Mandate", a Christian nationalist doctrine prescribing that Christians must dominate seven domains of society, is functioning as an active governing framework.

The institutional entrenchment extends beyond policy documents. Trump established the White House Faith Office, the first White House office dedicated exclusively to faith, reporting directly to the president from the West Wing. Faith Directors or Faith Liaisons were appointed across every department and government agency. The office is led by pastor Paula White-Cain, a proponent of the so-called prosperity gospel and the New Apostolic Reformation, a movement that believes Christians must seize political and societal power. Trump additionally established a taskforce to "eradicate anti-Christian bias", charged with scrutinising all government agencies for anti-Christian policy. The IRS announced it would no longer enforce the decades-old rule prohibiting churches from endorsing political candidates as a condition of tax-exempt status.

In the same vein, Trump is portrayed by some as a messianic figure, chosen by God to restore the nation and make America great again. MAGA rallies are increasingly saturated with Christian nationalist imagery, with faith leaders embedded in the political organisation and prominent government officials alike propagating such themes.





Source and rights: Pete Hegseth's Instagram



Source and rights: The Wall Street Journal

Pete Hegseth, the American Secretary of Defense, has several tattoos inspired by Christianity and the Crusades. "Deus Vult" (God wills it) is a Christian motto used during the Crusades. Contemporary Christian nationalists and white supremacists have since adopted the slogan. Hegseth conducts monthly prayer services at the Pentagon, open to both military and civilian personnel. During one such service, he prayed for "overwhelming violence" against "those who deserve no mercy". Faith has thus become policy.

Conservative American organisations such as ADF and Turning Point USA have likewise accelerated Christian nationalism by lobbying and mobilising against the rights of women and minorities. ADF, the legal advocacy group that played an influential role in overturning *Roe v. Wade*, has expanded its reach into Europe, with offices in London, Brussels and Vienna. Turning Point USA has established branches in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Australia.



Another key figure behind the Christian nationalist agenda is the German-American tech billionaire Peter Thiel, co-founder of Palantir Technologies. As a devout Christian, Thiel holds conservative and outspoken anti-abortion positions, and pumps millions into Republican politics and right-wing organisations. His theological worldview is therefore far more than a fringe opinion. Thiel also occupies himself with biblical end-times prophecy and delivers a series of "Antichrist" lectures behind closed doors. These lectures, held since 2023 in the US, the UK, Rome and Paris, present Christianity as the last line of defence against civilisational decay and label secular liberalism as a kind of spiritual poison destroying the West from within. For Thiel, national rebirth and Christian identity are inextricably bound together — one cannot exist without the other.



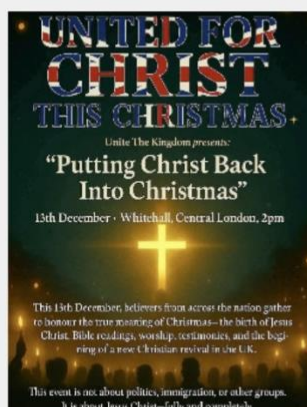
Source and rights: X @jtworr

Thiel's lecture in Cambridge at the end of January 2026 was organised by Dr. James Orr, associate professor at the Faculty of Divinity of the University of Cambridge and head of policy at Reform UK (the radical right-wing populist party led by Nigel Farage). The lectures took place behind closed doors in the Ramsden Room of St Catharine's College, accessible only to guests personally invited by Orr. Orr sits at the intersection of academic theology, British populist right-wing politics and the transatlantic Christian nationalist network around Thiel and JD Vance. This illustrates that Christian nationalism is also gaining increasing institutional ground in the United Kingdom.

Reform UK has progressively adopted rhetoric mirroring Christian nationalist themes, particularly around demographic change, the promotion of the "traditional family" and the defence of British "Judeo-Christian" heritage. The "Unite the Kingdom" anti-immigration demonstrations organised by extremist Stephen Christopher Yaxley-Lennon (Tommy Robinson), which gained momentum following the 2024 riots, similarly blend nationalist and Christian imagery. Organisers explicitly invoke faith as the foundation for their mobilisation, with participants carrying wooden crosses and placards bearing Bible verses.



Following his acquittal in November 2025, Yaxley-Lennon declared that Elon Musk had covered his legal costs, which he claimed amounted to nearly £100,000. Musk regularly shares his posts on X and addressed one of his rallies via video link. In December 2025, Yaxley-Lennon organised a Christmas gathering outside Downing Street under the banner "Put Christ Back in Christmas", featuring Bible readings, gospel music and candles. The Church of England described it as offensive that people were exploiting the Christian celebration of Christmas as a weapon in a culture war. On Saturday 16 May 2026, Yaxley-Lennon's demonstration saw a striking surge of Christian and Crusader symbolism. Over 200 crosses were handmade and distributed to demonstrators.



Source and rights: Unite the Kingdom



Source and rights: @Liberfach0



Source and rights: @PrayingPete

The fusion of Church and State in Russia serves as an example of what Christian nationalism seeks to achieve elsewhere. Under Patriarch Kirill, the Russian Orthodox Church has explicitly framed the war in Ukraine in civilisational and spiritual terms: as a defence of "traditional Christian values" against a decadent secular West. JfP's Asia-Pacific report describes how the Kremlin has institutionalised these values as an instrument of foreign policy: funding European far-right parties and coordinating lobbying efforts against LGBTIQ+ and abortion rights. Russian oligarchs Konstantin Malofeev, Alexey Komov and Vladimir Yakunin have directly funded anti-rights organisations and their gatherings, including the World Congress of Families (WCF) and the Political Network for Values (PNfV), thereby contributing internationally to a Kremlin-aligned Christian nationalist agenda.

The same pattern is visible in Hungary, where Viktor Orbán explicitly built his political position on the defence of Christian civilisation and embedded this in constitutional and cultural policy. In Poland, the alliance between Church and state led to severe abortion restrictions and the establishment of so-called "LGBTI-free zones", areas where local authorities officially declared their opposition to what they termed "LGBTI ideology", framed in the same Christian nationalist terms. JfP documented in Africa and the Asia-Pacific region that Christianity is being deployed to roll back rights under the guise of tradition and family values, with Russian influence also visible in the dissemination of these narratives.



### **The Great Replacement Theory**

Christian nationalism is also intertwined with the "Great Replacement theory". The Identitarian movement has placed this theory at the heart of its ideology, with the aforementioned Martin Sellner as its most prominent exponent. Former PVV politician Gidi Markuszower also invoked this idea during an asylum seeker centre protest in Loosdrecht in May, where he stated: "We are being replaced". FvD likewise makes intensive use of the Great Replacement theory in its rhetoric. Lidewij de Vos is set to speak at Sellner's upcoming "Remigration Summit" on 30 May in Porto, a conference built around ethno-nationalism.

"Remigration" advocates the mass deportation of migrants and their descendants in order to restore ethnic, cultural and often Christian homogeneity. Sellner has explicitly tied his ideas to the preservation of Christian civilisation and presents demographic change as an existential threat to white European-Christian identity. His ideology has spread through Defend networks, European right-wing and populist parties and online far-right subcultures, and is being amplified by Big Tech figures such as Elon Musk and Peter Thiel. The Netherlands is no exception.

### **The ideological function of Christian symbols within nationalism**

In the context of this mobilisation, Christian imagery and messaging serve a specific purpose. They express solidarity, legitimise grievances and place opposition to asylum reception within a larger narrative of civilisational struggle. Crosses, rosaries and medieval symbolism sanctify the fight rather than rendering it merely political. Demographic change, immigration and LGBTIQ+ visibility are framed as existential threats to a natural, Christian way of life.

The use of Templar and Crusader symbolism by the Defend groups draws on a long history of violent appropriation. Christian nationalists have long idealised the Crusades as a heroic defence of Christian civilisation against Islam or the "Other". The Templar knight in particular represents the warrior saint: a figure who kills in defence of the faith and of cultural or ethnic homogeneity, and who unites martyrdom with militancy.



Source and rights: Defend Den Bosch Facebook page

Norwegian terrorist Anders Breivik idealised the Templars, declared himself to be a Templar, published photographs of himself in uniform and incorporated the Templar cross and its associated ideology into his manifesto. The Ku Klux Klan has likewise adopted Templar motifs and cast itself as "new crusaders". In addition, international Defend and Templar-affiliated groups regularly post Islamophobic content alongside chivalric imagery, a deliberate reference to the Crusaders.



The protection of women and children is deployed to frame the movement as defensive rather than aggressive. In the logic of Christian nationalism, the heterosexual Christian family forms the cornerstone of civilisation. Its protection, in this line of reasoning, justifies extraordinary measures against LGBTIQ+ minorities and women's rights. JfP sees this reflected in ultra-conservative American organisations such as Family Watch International (FWI) and ADF. This narrative around women and children also carries a radicalised undercurrent, invoking persistent stereotypes about the threat that Muslim men allegedly pose to white European women and children. That is a recurring motif in remigration rhetoric.



### **The risks and democratic implications of Christian nationalism**

When religious imagery is deployed alongside opposition to asylum reception, exclusionary rhetoric gains stronger legitimization. Hostility towards minorities and asylum seekers is then no longer perceived as prejudice, but as a spiritual, biblical, civilisational and even parental duty.

This has three concrete consequences. Ideas that previously belonged to the margins penetrate mainstream culture, clothed in the language of Christian values. Dividing lines between communities deepen, and an exclusionary vision reduces non-Christians to second-class citizens. And where grievance and hostility towards minorities converge, that can tip over into violence.

Not every religious expression is extremism. It becomes dangerous when Christian symbols are systematically deployed alongside nationalist, anti-asylum and racist messaging, and when those patterns connect to documented transnational networks.

The Netherlands is one piece of a larger global development. JfP has observed the same ideological movement take root and escalate across multiple continents, as in Uganda where the death penalty for homosexuality has since been introduced.

Seemingly isolated individuals carrying crosses to demonstrations are connected to a broader ecosystem. That ecosystem is held together by financial flows JfP has documented, running through training networks of American evangelical institutions. It operates through legal strategies in European courts. It is amplified on social media by some of the wealthiest people in the world. And it is sustained by a transnational project that has by now demonstrated its capacity to reshape a federal government.

The question for the Netherlands is not whether these dynamics are present. The question is whether civil society, faith communities and democratic institutions can identify what they are confronted with sharply and swiftly enough. The Council of Churches has already named what is happening from within the Christian tradition. Democratic institutions face the same task.



## About Justice for Prosperity

Stichting Justice for Prosperity (JfP) is an independent research and detection platform based in Amsterdam that exposes and helps counter societal manipulation and corrosive threats. We investigate how actors organise themselves online and offline, what networks, narratives, drivers and revenue models lie behind them, and how they put democratic processes and institutions, social cohesion and fundamental rights under pressure.

Operating from within international civil society, JfP works together with citizens, journalists, knowledge institutions, governments and civil society partners. In doing so, we connect digital research to our offline fieldwork, security analysis and strategic interpretation. This allows us to make visible which actors exert influence invisibly, through what tactics they operate, how messages spread and what effect they seek to achieve.

We translate these insights into threat and risk profiles, security strengthening and strategic support for organisations and institutions seeking to increase their resilience. The greatest focus, however, is on helping to strengthen societal resilience through public education, training and the building of alliances.

### For more information and contact:

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