

Ceremonies

We believe ceremonies of national importance should become secular in character. All members of British society should feel equally included and it is no longer appropriate for the Church to presume to lead the nation in such events. A majority of the UK population is not Christian, or even religious, and our civic ceremonies should reflect that.

Civic ceremonies in which people of all faiths and none are invited to participate on an equal basis without dominating or controlling, have a powerful potential to unite.

What's the problem?

Public ceremonies of national importance still tend to be dominated by Christianity and the established church – despite the large proportion of the population which is either from another religion, or more likely not religious or religiously indifferent. Such ceremonies should be secular in nature to ensure they are not in any way alienating of an increasingly non-religious and multi-faith Britain.

Remembrance

The annual ceremony of remembrance at the Cenotaph has changed little since it was first introduced in 1921; exclusively Christian rituals are prominent, hymns are sung, a bishop leads a religious procession, a cross is born in front of the procession and the bishop leads Christian prayers. For most Britons, Remembrance Day is an extremely important national event – it gives people the chance to think about what it is to be part of the nation of Britain and to think about all those who were courageous and selfless enough to offer their lives because the country asked them to.

Christianity in general, and the Church of England in particular, can no longer be fully inclusive of the whole nation. The prayers and rituals of the Church can be alienating or seen as irrelevant to an increasing proportion of the population. It is therefore legitimate to question the appropriateness of the Church being so closely associated with a national ceremony of remembrance, which should be equally inclusive of all citizens, regardless of religion and belief.

We would like to see the Remembrance Day commemoration ceremony at the Cenotaph become secular in character. Remembrance ceremonies should be led by national or civic leaders and include a period of silence for participants to remember the fallen in their own way, be that religious or not.

The Coronation

The appointment, election or succession of a head of state — whether in a republic or a constitutional monarchy such as the UK — plays an important role in forming and reflecting a nation's identity and being the time when all stand together in unity.

Currently, this ceremony happens as part of an exclusively Anglican ritual in Westminster Abbey.

The act of anointment is performed by a priest rather than a civil official, with the succession 'sanctioned and blessed by God'. The UK is the only democracy to have such an explicitly Christian ceremony for its head of state's accession, with the monarch pledging to maintain the "Laws of God". It also has sectarian anti-Catholic overtones.

At the coronation the head of state makes their oath to serve the British people. This contract is a symbol of stability and continuity in the country. Regardless of whether individuals support the idea of monarchy or not, it is important for all that the head of state's official accession is inclusive and representative of the heterogeneous state the new monarch will be heading.

The current ceremony invests the holder of the crown with such express sacredness, echoing the divine right of kings. It is not only likely to seem outdated to many, within the context of modern Britain, but it is also inaccessible to many in terms of what it seeks to represent. The coronation is representative of a significant constitutional event and we see it as inappropriate for that to occur solely through a religious service.

It would be far better for the accession ceremony to take place in the seat of representative democracy – in Westminster Hall, for example, and it should not be religious. An optional religious blessing could occur afterwards, perhaps in Westminster Abbey, if the new monarch so wishes.

What you can do:

[Our national ceremonies should be inclusive for all. I support civic ceremonies in which people of all faiths and none are invited to participate on an equal basis.](#)

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More information

- [Remembrance Sunday should not be dominated by religion](#)

Historian and NSS honorary associate Dan Snow, on the dangers of national remembrance ceremonies falling out of touch with the nation because of religious dominance.

- [National occasions need not be dominated by religion – as France's commemoration ceremony so poignantly demonstrated](#)

France's recent ceremony for those killed in the Paris attacks was a moving demonstration that non-religious ceremonies are a powerful way to unite people regardless of faith or politics; it is something the UK could emulate for our own public ceremonies, writes Keith Porteous Wood.

- [Cenotaph a Consensual and Contested Monument of Remembrance](#) (PDF, 348 Kb)

A paper by Norman Bonney on the Cenotaph's secular history and public opposition to the official state ceremony of remembrance being explicitly Christian.

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