

Secular Head of State

The British monarch, as well as being Head of State, also holds the title 'Defender of the Faith and Supreme Governor of the Church of England'. Under current laws, the monarch is required to "join in communion" with the Church of England and take on the role of Supreme Governor, promoting Anglicanism in Britain.

No head of state, be they monarch or not, should promote an official religious preference, far less be under a formal obligation to sustain one. That's why we want to see an end to the ties between our Head of State and the Church of England.

What's the problem?

The position of the head of state should not be reserved for members of one particular faith. That's why most of the world's countries allow citizens of any religious affiliation to be head of state.

UK law dictates that the British monarch must also be a full, confirmed member of the Church of England – an anachronism in one of the least religious and most religiously diverse countries in the world. And despite dwindling congregations, the monarch must also promise to maintain the Church of England in their coronation oath, and to preserve the Church of Scotland at the meeting of the Privy Council immediately following their accession.

The British monarch's coronation reinforces the privileged position of the Church of England. The Church has a key role in the coronation of a new monarch, who is crowned and anointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury during an Anglican coronation ceremony held in Westminster Abbey. As part of this process the incoming sovereign must take the Accession Oath, in which they swear to 'maintain and preserve inviolably the settlement of the Church of England, and the doctrine worship, discipline, and government thereof, as by law established in England'.

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. If the monarch declares an allegiance to, and indeed preferential status for, only one religion (as happens at the coronation), it renders everyone who is not of that religion to be less than full citizens.

It should also be noted that Catholics are explicitly excluded from becoming the monarch. Catholics are officially termed as being "naturally dead and deemed to be dead" in terms of succession, according to the Succession to the Crown Act 2013.

The monarch should be free to follow any personal faith, or none, but the monarch is the only person in the country not free to have whatever personal faith they wish, or have none at all.

If British monarchs are to continue acting as Head of State, they should relinquish the role of head of Church in order to end the unfair privilege afforded to the Church of England, and to retain their relevancy in modern UK society.

What are we doing?

- Our campaign for a secular Head of State is a facet of our broader campaign to [disestablish the Church of England](#). We also campaign to make [national ceremonies](#) like the coronation

secular and inclusive. We take every possible opportunity to emphasise the fact that a secular state offers the best means of ensuring freedom, tolerance and equality for all citizens, religious and non-religious alike.

- Our 2017 [disestablishment report](#) argued that Prince Charles's accession to the throne will offer a "particularly opportune moment" to move forward on separating Church and State.

What you can do:

[Our head of state shouldn't have any constitutional entanglement with religion. I support the NSS campaign for a secular head of state.](#)

[Click to tweet](#)

Watch this space

There aren't any specific campaign actions to highlight at the moment. Please check back soon.

- [Write to your MP](#)

More information

- [Disestablish the Church](#)

We want to separate church and state so no religion has undue influence over our politics & society.

[Read More](#)

- [Ceremonies](#)

Our national ceremonies should be inclusive for all, not automatically led by the declining Church.

[Read More](#)

- [Religion and the investiture of the Monarch: The European context](#) (PDF, 161 Kb)

NSS researcher Barry Thorpe has found no other investiture of a European monarch with such overt religious, far less sectarian, associations as in the UK.

- [Monarch's role as head of Church of England unsustainable](#)

The National Secular Society says that the Queen's or any future Monarch's role as Supreme Governor of the Church of England is unsustainable – despite the results of a new

poll showing that 79% of British adults think that the Queen still has an important "faith role".

[Read More](#)

While you're here

Please consider a donation to enable us campaign for the separation of religion and government. Together we can make a fairer more secular state.

- [Support us from just £1 a month](#)