

The British monarch is required to take on the role of Supreme Governor of the Church of England.

No head of state should promote an official religious preference.

Let's end the ties between our head of state and the Church.

Our head of state, the monarch, holds the title 'Defender of the Faith and Supreme Governor of the Church of England'.

This means the monarch must also be a full member of the Church of England – an anachronism in one of the least religious and most religiously diverse countries in the world.

Despite dwindling congregations, the monarch must also take an oath to maintain the Church of England and to preserve the Church of Scotland.

The position of head of state should not be reserved for members of one particular faith.

Most countries allow citizens of any religious affiliation to be head of state. Everyone should be free to follow any personal faith, or none. The monarch is the only person in the country not free to have whatever personal faith they wish or have none at all.

Only [34%](#) of the public think future British monarchs should be required to be members of the Church of England and keep the title of supreme governor of the Church of England.

The ties between the Church and the monarchy are typified by the coronation. 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" during an Anglican coronation ceremony in Westminster Abbey. The Church has a key role in the coronation of a new monarch, who is crowned and anointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury. The coronation also has sectarian anti-Catholic overtones. Catholics are explicitly excluded from becoming monarch.

The monarch's declaration of preferential status for one denomination of one religion renders everyone who is not of that religion less than full citizens.

If British monarchs are to continue acting as head of state, they should relinquish the role of head of the Church in order to end the unfair privilege afforded to the Church of England, and show equal regard for citizens of all faiths and none.

Take Action!

1. Write to your MP

While our Head of State is also the head of the established church, we cannot have church-state separation. Ask your MP to support the separation of church and state.

Enter Postcode:

Find my MP

2. Share your story

Tell us why you support this campaign, and how you are personally affected by the issue. You can also let us know if you would like assistance with a particular issue.

- [Share your story](#)

3. Join the National Secular Society

Become a member of the National Secular Society today! Together, we can separate religion and state for greater freedom and fairness.

- [Join us!](#)

Latest updates

[Tackling CofE privilege unites Anglicans and atheists at NSS event](#)

Posted: Thu, 18 May 2023 11:46

Politicians and priests united to challenge Church of England privileges at a National Secular Society event in parliament yesterday.

Four speakers joined the NSS's discussion on the future of church and state to argue why separation between the two would benefit both the UK state and the Church itself.

The event at the Houses of Parliament was held in the wake of King Charles' Anglican [coronation](#) this month, which shone a spotlight on the intimate relationship between church and state in the UK.

The Church's established status has also come under [increased scrutiny](#) over its continued discrimination against LGBT people and women, and its recent safeguarding scandals.

The four speakers called for an end to the CofE's many privileges, including [automatic seats](#) for its bishops in the House of Lords and Christian prayers imposed in [parliament](#) and [schools](#).

Tommy Sheppard MP: Church in parliament "offends against a sense of democracy"

The event was opened by Scottish National Party MP Tommy Sheppard, who sponsored the event. He said he was "surprised and shocked" by the extent to which the Church permeates parliament, and that both prayers in parliament and bishops in the Lords "offend against a sense of democracy".

Pointing to the recent [Census results](#) for England and Wales, which revealed Christians are a minority for the first time, he said we are "no longer a Christian country" and that the role of the Church in parliament is "incredibly unrepresentative" of the population. He said it was incumbent on

the government to make parliament more representative. He plans to arrange a debate on the bishops' bench and put questions to ministers that "they will find hard to answer".

Jayne Ozanne: The established Church 'doesn't serve anyone particularly well'

Jayne Ozanne, a prominent gay evangelical who works to ensure full inclusion of LGBT+ people within faith communities, highlighted that only 55% of British people trust clergy to tell the truth. This is less trustworthy than taxi drivers, and is 30 points behind trust levels in 1983.

She said this decline in trust in the Church "should cause greatest concern", but comes as "no surprise" in the wake of sexual abuse scandals and cover-ups, including the recent report into [bishops' inaction](#) over rapist priest Trevor Devamanikkam. She also condemned the "toxic nature of institutional homophobia" in Church culture. She said the "tide is turning" on the "hypocrisy" of the Church "lecturing" the government on morality.

Ozanne said that bishops should not be automatically elevated to the House of Lords, and criticised them for using their privilege to obtain exemptions from equality law to discriminate against LGBT people.

Finally, she questioned who establishment serves. She said doesn't serve the monarch, the country, God or even the bishops, because serving in the House of Lords interferes with their role of running a dioceses. She concluded that establishment doesn't serve "anyone particularly well", ending with: "We need champions who will defend all the vulnerable, who will speak and be heard, and whose voices are ones that the nation recognise as trustworthy and true.

"And I'm sorry to say that this is no longer, in my mind, automatically that of the bishops – and so their privileges must now go".

Dr Martyn Percy: Established Church is an overcramped "vestry cupboard"

Ozanne was followed by theologian and ordained CofE priest Dr Martyn Percy. He compared establishment with an old, dusty "vestry cupboard" overcramped with things no longer needed. He said that he was "really struck" by the Church's efforts to make things "look clean and tidy", when underneath is "chaos, confusion and even corruption". He said he is still a Christian but has "lost faith" in the Church of England to reform itself.

Dr Percy criticised Church law as "out of touch" with employment and human rights law, and Church safeguarding as a "catastrophic mess", with too many conflicts of interest and conflation of power and authority.

He echoed Ozanne's concerns about the Church's failure to solve issues like same-sex marriage, and said the bishops in the Lords are "highly problematic" as they should be there on merit rather than appointed by right.

He said "parliament must act" to repeal the Church's privileges and that it would not take much time to set things in motion.

Finally, quoting Michael Caine in *The Italian Job*, he said the solution to the 'vestry cupboard' of the established church is to "blow the bloody doors off".

Polly Toynbee: Coronation a "turning point" for the established Church

The final speaker, writer and broadcaster Polly Toynbee, said the coronation was a 'shocking wake up moment' for many people, who were left "gobsmacked" by the highly religious and "peculiar" nature of the ceremony and the vows King Charles took to maintain "the Laws of God" and the "Protestant Reformed Religion established by law". She pointed out this meant the archbishop "had more powers than the King did", and that the coronation was therefore "quite a turning point" in making disestablishment relevant.

Toynbee highlighted how the Church's privileges support state-funded Church of England [faith schools](#), many of which are "socially selective" due to their religiously discriminatory admissions policies, and the law requiring collective worship in all schools.

She criticised the bishops using their privileges in parliament to oppose a range of social reforms, including same sex marriage and [assisted dying](#). She stressed that we have to remember the Church still has an "enormous impact on how we live and how we die".

NSS chief executive "Really heartening to see a growing 'broad church' in favour of replacing privilege with equality"

NSS chief executive Stephen Evans, who chaired the event, said: "This discussion not only emphasised why it is more important than ever to disestablish the Church of England – it demonstrated that the appetite for separation of church and state is growing among Brits of all religions and beliefs.

"It is really heartening to see a growing 'broad church' in favour of replacing privilege with equality. And our excellent speakers last night embodied this perfectly.

"A huge thank you to Tommy Sheppard, Jayne Ozanne, Martyn Percy and Polly Toynbee for so eloquently putting into words what increasing numbers of individuals, both within and outside of the Church, are thinking."

Image: (From left): Martyn Percy, Tommy Sheppard, Stephen Evans and Jayne Ozanne

Coronation should trigger debate on church and state, says NSS

Posted: Tue, 2 May 2023 09:32

King Charles' coronation should trigger a debate on the future relationship between church and state, the NSS has said.

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