

Judges' religious service criticised by secular lawyers

Posted: Wed, 1st Oct 2014

Secular lawyers have called for a separation of the Church of England from judicial affairs after judges marked the start of the legal year with an Anglican service.

The annual Judges' Service, held today (1 October) at Westminster Abbey, was attended by the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, the Lord Chief Justice, judges and other members of the legal profession.

The Lawyers' Secular Society (LSS) criticised the ceremony, calling it an "inappropriate reinforcement of the link between the Church and the state" and have called on the justice secretary, Chris Grayling, to discontinue the annual ritual.

LSS members Peter Fisher, a retired Ministry of Justice civil servant, and John Butcher, a Surrey councillor, say the service has a potential impact on the impartiality, or perceived impartiality of judges attending it and warn that the service runs the risk of undermining public confidence in the judiciary.

The service has its roots in the religious practice of judges praying for guidance at the beginning of the legal term. The custom dates back to the Middle Ages when the High Court was held in Westminster Hall and judges would walk over to Westminster Abbey for the service.

Members of judiciary attending the service do so in their official capacity, during working hours, wearing their judicial robes. The service itself is held in private; and is not open to the public and the media.

Charlie Klendjian, secretary of the Lawyers' Secular Society, said: "Democracy is an ever-evolving and ever-improving process. The machinery of democracy, which most certainly includes its legal system, must keep up with that drumbeat and we have every right to expect a fully secular legal system. It is high time this archaic service was abolished."

- [Share on What's App](#)
- [Share on Facebook](#)
- [Share on Twitter](#)
- [Share on Email](#)
- [Subscribe to RSS Feed](#)

Tags: [Disestablishment](#), [Government prayers](#)

Related Campaigns

•

[Disestablish the Church of England](#)

A state religion has no place in a 21st century democracy.

[Read More](#)

•

[End prayers in parliament and councils](#)

Prayers aren't government business.

[Read More](#)

Related Articles

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

Politicians and priests united to challenge Church of England privileges at a National Secular Society event in parliament... [Read More »](#)

[Our MPs now subscribe to many religious beliefs and none – it's time to scrap parliamentary prayers](#)

A religiously diverse new intake of MPs should prompt the removal of parliamentary prayers and the Church of England's... [Read More »](#)

[NSS urges lord chancellor to scrap Anglican judges' service](#)

The National Secular Society has urged the lord chancellor to scrap the annual Anglican services which mark the start... [Read More »](#)

[Institutionalised prayer doesn't belong in parliament](#)

As MPs launch a motion against parliamentary prayers, NSS CEO Stephen Evans says ending the anachronistic custom would... [Read More »](#)

Prayers shouldn't be part of parliamentary business, say MPs

MPs have called for an end to the practice of holding prayers in parliament before the start of official business... [Read More »](#)