

Mourning Elizabeth

**Christianity and the
Bible in the funeral of
Queen Elizabeth II**

RHIANNON MCALEER & ROB BARWARD-SYMMONS

About Bible Society

Around the world, Bible Society works to translate, produce and distribute Scripture, helps people learn to read it, and equips pastors and teachers. In England and Wales we resource churches and individual believers to increase their confidence in the Bible, and we invite change in how people see the Bible in wider culture.



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In brief

In September 2022 Britain mourned the death of a reigning monarch for the first time in over 70 years. As befitted the twenty-first century, these events were broadcast across traditional and new media around the world, with the public given access to a series of ceremonies that had been previously hidden to all but a few. Yet at their heart, these elaborate royal rituals were deeply indebted to long-standing Christian language, Scripture, and music – elements that have been present in everyday Anglican funerals for centuries. With the Bible being quoted 40 times across the official events, we found that this was an enormous and unprecedented public Scripture event reaching tens of millions in Britain alone. Taking place in the context of a country that is no longer majority Christian, the prominence of these overtly religious events presented fascinating questions for the role of religion in modern Britain.

We found a nation that was favourable towards the Queen herself and towards the monarchy, albeit with considerably more warmth among older people and Christian groups. A third of those who engaged with the funeral said they found the Bible readings personally moving and appropriate, while a quarter said they heard elements of the Bible they had never heard before. Rather than appearing outdated or alienating, the vast majority found the prominence of Christianity to be appropriate not only due to the Queen's personal faith but more generally for a British royal event. This was true across age groups, ethnicities and religions, with limited appetite for the inclusion of secular or multifaith aspects in similar royal state events in the future. Despite this, we found a growing trend away from desiring Christian elements in personal funerals, raising fascinating questions around the continuing role of religion in the private and public spheres as we enter a new era of British life.

Executive summary

In September 2022 Britain mourned the death of a reigning monarch for the first time in over 70 years. At their heart, these elaborate royal rituals were deeply indebted to long-standing Christian language, Scripture, and music, resulting in an enormous and unprecedented public Scripture event reaching tens of millions in Britain alone. Taking place in the context of a country that is no longer majority Christian, the prominence of these overtly religious events presented fascinating questions for the role of religion in modern Britain. In the weeks following the events, Bible Society commissioned YouGov to survey 3,000 adults across England and Wales to understand the response to these events that so prominently featured Christianity and the Bible. Here's what we found:

A faithful and popular monarch

The Queen's deeply personal Christian faith was prominent throughout her life and was reflected in her memorial and funeral events. While she was particularly popular among Christians, this spread beyond those who shared her faith.

- 68% of the population said they were favourable towards the Queen, with only 10% being unfavourable
- 62% support Britain remaining a monarchy, with 27% in favour of a republic. Among 18-24-year-olds, support for remaining a monarchy is much lower, at 43%
- Across age groups there is greater warmth towards the Queen and the monarchy among churchgoers than their non-churchgoing peers. Nonetheless, even among non-religious people, a majority support remaining a monarchy
- The Queen's public faith was very influential, particularly among churchgoing Christians. Over half of churchgoers said the life of the Queen positively influenced how they saw Christianity – and these perceptions were further improved among approximately a third of churchgoers through the mourning events

A unique Bible moment in history

The mourning events following the death of Queen Elizabeth were moments of extraordinary reach and exposure of the Bible, with modern media making it an unprecedented event in global history. Throughout the events, Christian ritual, liturgy, and Scripture were central, and these were largely viewed warmly – but opportunities remain for Bible communicators.

68%

of the population said they were favourable towards the Queen, with only 10% being unfavourable

- If someone watched all of the official mourning events they would have heard 3,923 words of the Bible, forming 198 verses, drawn from 13 books of the Bible, in three languages – English, Welsh and Gaelic
- 70% of respondents engaged with the funeral, with 29% saying they heard parts of the Bible they'd not heard before. This rises to 40% among 18–24-year-olds
- One-third said they found the Bible passages moving (with 15% disagreeing), while 31% said they were relevant to their feelings at the time, compared to 18% who disagreed
- However, one-quarter said they were boring, while around a quarter of young people aged 18-34 (24%) and those from other faiths (26%) said they found the Bible difficult to understand

Christianity has a place in royal events

Christian ritual and Scripture were a persistent and prominent presence throughout the funeral and mourning events. In both this specific case and looking to royal events more widely, we found widespread support for retaining this Christian focus and little interest in the events becoming wholly secular – even among those from other religions and non-religious backgrounds.

- Overwhelmingly, those who engaged in the funeral events believed the presence of Christianity was appropriate. 79% agreed it was appropriate given the faith of the Queen as an individual, while 72% said it was appropriate for a British royal event
- 55% of respondents said they were happy that the events were wholly Christian, with only 12% saying they found this prominence alienating and fewer than one in ten (9%) saying they should have instead been wholly secular. Even among the non-religious, 36% said they were happy the events were wholly Christian, with only 12% saying should have been wholly secular.
- Overall, people are more likely to agree (31%) than disagree (21%) with keeping state royal events wholly Christian in the future. Likewise there is little appetite for the events becoming wholly secular with 15% agreeing. Among non-religious respondents this is only slightly higher at 18%
- 37% of adults agree a state royal event should feature the Bible, two-and-a-half times more than those who disagree (14%)



Foreword – Catherine Pepinster

In death, as in her life, the message imparted by Elizabeth II was unapologetically a Christian one. The orb and sceptre, only previously in her presence at her coronation in 1953, remained on her coffin throughout her Lying-in-State in Westminster Hall, and during her funeral in Westminster Abbey and her committal at St George’s Chapel, Windsor. Both the orb and the sceptre symbolise how the world – and even its kings and queens – is the dominion of Christ. No king – or queen – matches in importance the Prince of Peace, the King of kings.

That is a symbolism I have come to understand after studying the relationship between the British monarchy and religion but it is not necessarily familiar to everybody, especially those Britons today who are atheist, or agnostic, or belong to a faith other than Christianity. Yet as this study of the death of Elizabeth II shows, huge numbers of people, not only in Britain but across the world, were drawn to watch her funeral and committal. After 70 years as Queen, Elizabeth II was one of the most famous people in the world. Her long reign had helped her come to be seen as a beacon of stability, and much of that stability was down to her Christian faith. Just as Christ is the Church’s sure foundation, so he was hers.

This latest study provides vital information about the responses of the 33 million people who watched at least some of the rolling television news coverage of the Queen’s death on September 8, 2022, and her funeral, which reached a peak audience of 28 million people. If you want to understand further what the Queen’s faith meant to people, whether it impacted on their own understanding of Christianity, and even helped sustain their own faith, this study has the data. It also attempts to explain what people made of the liturgical and scriptural elements of the Queen’s funeral and committal. They were the most watched religious ceremonies of recent times, and Bible readings were an essential element.

This study reveals that the Bible can resonate with people on an emotional as well as spiritual level – even for those who are not traditional churchgoers and Bible readers. Those whose chief concern is Bible mission can take heart from the impact that Scripture had on people in the days following the death of Elizabeth II. But there are lessons to be learned too. In a culture where the Bible is not as well known as it once was and where there can be hostile elements as well as people who have at least a vague interest in Scripture – and others have a passionate attachment – there are great challenges. Some of those interviewed for this study were honest enough to admit that they did not understand all the Christian rituals of the funeral, nor the Bible readings.

Some confessed to being bored by them. Given that this study shows there seems to be general agreement that major royal events, such as weddings and funerals – and of course, coronations – should remain Christian, the Church, the monarchy and other Scriptural experts need to discuss how to make the Bible more comprehensible.

One of the intriguing aspects of the British monarchy in recent times is that its links with Christianity have become more apparent. From the annual Cenotaph service on Remembrance Sunday, to services of thanksgiving for the ending of wars or for royal jubilees, to royal weddings and funerals, Christian ceremonies have become significant public events, broadcast to the nation and beyond. As this study shows, they offer a huge challenge if people without a Christian background are to understand them. But they also offer a significant opportunity as well to invite people to get to know the Bible and the faith it sustained for Elizabeth II and also for her son and successor, Charles III.

Catherine Pepinster is author of *Defenders of the Faith – the British Monarchy, Religion and the Coronation*, published by Hodder and Stoughton, a commentator on religion and contributor to BBC Radio 4's Thought for the Day.

Introduction

When on 8 September 2022 Britain learned that Queen Elizabeth II, the longest reigning monarch in British history-and perhaps the most recognisable woman in the world-had died at the age of 96, the nation entered a period of official mourning and a moment unique in history.

For 11 days, television, radios and online feeds were filled with obituaries, tributes and coverage of succession events and memorial services, culminating in the State Funeral and committal service on 19 September which was watched by more than 26 million viewers. Throughout these moments Christian ritual, liturgy, Scripture and music took a remarkable prominence in public space, guiding a now minority-Christian nation through the mourning period and resulting in the largest mass Bible communication event in British history. How were these Christian aspects received? How did the life of the Queen, and the events that followed her death, impact people's views of Christianity, the Church, and the Bible? This research, undertaken in the weeks following the mourning events, explores this question.

The Bible Society research programme seeks to understand attitudes to religion and the Bible across all faiths and none. Given the unique significance of the mourning period for public Christianity and the Bible we commissioned research agency YouGov to undertake a nationally representative survey to understand how the public responded to the Christian elements of the mourning period and uncover what difference, if any, it made to their perceptions of Christianity and the Bible, as well as their views on the monarchy in general. As we will discuss throughout, the results are both encouraging and challenging for the Church.

We hope also to contribute to the wider conversation about the changing role of Christianity in Britain. The Queen lived through a period of astonishing change, including dramatic shifts in religious identity and the place of Christianity in British society. Nearly three months after her funeral, the results of the 2021 Census revealed for the first time that fewer than half of the population identified as Christian, while the proportion of those saying they had no religion had grown considerably. Like the monarchy after Queen Elizabeth, the Church faces a period of considerable change. Questions will continue to be raised both by Christians and others about its role in twenty-first-century Britain. The picture painted by the data presented in our survey is complex and there are no easy answers, but it does also suggest that there remains an appetite for the presence of both the monarchy and Christianity in modern Britain.

Summary of findings

In Chapter 1 we set the scene, with an analysis of perceptions of Queen Elizabeth, attitudes to remaining a monarchy or becoming a republic, and the role of the Queen as an ambassador for Christianity. We outline that support for remaining a monarchy is high in Britain, although young people are more split on becoming a republic. We note that the Queen was particularly influential among churchgoers – over half (56%) said the Queen positively influenced their view of Christianity, notable given the challenging recent decades for the Church in Britain. We also reveal our finding that both favourability to the Queen and to the monarchy are more likely among active Christians than among non-churchgoers. Nonetheless, even among non-religious people, the majority of the population support remaining a monarchy in the future.

In Chapter 2 we outline what elements of the mourning period our participants engaged in, finding high engagement from all groups but, again, particularly among Christians – over 80% of whom engaged with the funeral. We explore their experiences of the events and what impact it had on their perceptions of the monarchy, with those already warmest to the monarchy most likely to have viewed the events positively – including over 40% of churchgoers, who said the events improved their perceptions of the monarchy.

These themes are continued in Chapter 3, where we demonstrate the breadth and coverage of the Bible in the official mourning events, as well as our participants' reaction to the Scripture readings. We reveal that a quarter of those who engaged with the mourning and Funeral events heard parts of the Bible they'd not heard before, rising to 40% of 18–24-year-olds, marking the importance of this moment for Bible communication among young people. For about a third of those who engaged with these events, the Bible readings were received as personally relevant and moving, as well as appropriate for the event. There is evidence here that in events such as this, the Bible is welcomed beyond churchgoers alone. However, we also discuss that for some in the population, the Bible readings were experienced as hard to understand, boring and not relevant to their feelings at the time, presenting both challenge and opportunities for Bible communicators when it comes to the public presentation of Scripture.

In Chapter 4, we discuss whether the population believed the presence of Christianity to be appropriate to the Queen's memorial events, and their expectations for future royal events. With discussion on role of mourning rituals in public society, we reveal that overwhelmingly and regardless of religious perspective, those who engaged with the funeral events view the prominence of Christianity in the State Funeral as appropriate for both

These events resulted in the largest mass Bible communication event in British history

These findings show a clear argument for the continuing presence of Christian ritual and Scripture at the heart of British public life

the Queen as an individual and British royal events as a whole, being seen as neither alienating nor out of place in modern society. This shows the continuing power of religious guidance and tradition at times of national grief. Indeed, 55% of the population said they were happy the events were wholly Christian. Looking to the future, we did not find a strong appetite for fully secular or multifaith state royal events even among people of other faiths or with no religion. Instead, we found on average, people were more likely to agree than disagree with keeping state royal events wholly Christian in the future and there is an expectation the Bible will be present.

In our final chapter we explore how despite high engagement and relatively positive perception, the Queen's memorial period had very limited influence both on how the public felt about Christianity and on their own funeral plans. Our findings support wider research which indicate demand for Christian funerals is declining, providing a notable contrast for the seeming acceptance of Christianity in public ritual life compared to the personal. Nonetheless, we also outline that for some churchgoers, the events of the mourning period improved their perceptions of Christianity – just under a third (31%) said the mourning period improved their perception of the Church, while 29% said it improved their perceptions of Christianity. Again, we see the importance of the Queen as a Christian monarch to many Christians, and raise the possibility that positive, public demonstrations of Christianity from royalty support the confidence of the Church.

Overall we see a picture of a nation exposed to Scripture and deep Christian ritual throughout a unique moment in modern British history. This was a public largely appreciative of this Christian presence, not only in this specific case of a deeply religious individual, but across royal ritual events more generally. With the coronation of her successor on the horizon, these findings from the mourning period of Queen Elizabeth II show a clear argument for the continuing presence of Christian ritual and Scripture at the heart of British public life.

The survey and sample

The survey was undertaken by YouGov on its online panel with 3,035 adults in England and Wales (aged 18+). The figures have been weighted and are representative of adults in England and Wales, as derived from Census data. Unless otherwise stated, all figures are from YouGov Plc.

Fieldwork was undertaken 18–28 October 2022, six weeks after the Queen died. All surveys are a snapshot of a moment, and while we do not believe this survey was fielded close enough to the Queen's funeral to significantly affect

how participants responded, the following six months have been a turbulent period for the Royal Family. It is therefore possible that if polled again, the results of this survey would look different from the baseline we present here.

The participants are representative of the adult population of England and Wales. While multiple demographic breaks of the data are available, we have focused our analysis on age, religion/worldview, and churchgoing behaviour, with occasional mentions of gender and ethnicity. We also note that, while representative, the sample sizes of Black, Asian and other minority ethnicities as distinct groups were small, and reduced further still when filtered by engagement with the mourning and funeral events. We make occasional reference to trends within these groups throughout, but have not reported fully due to the sample size and have therefore tended to refer to non-White British respondents as a broader group. We encourage further research in this area.

Finally, throughout this report we make reference to an additional population group we define as 'Dismissives'. This is taken from the results of a large population study undertaken by Bible Society with YouGov in 2018 which surveyed 19,101 adults in England and Wales on attitudes to religion, Christianity and the Bible. We undertook a type of statistical analysis called cluster analysis which identified eight segments (or as described by Bible Society, personas) in the population – groups of people who share common attitudes and behaviours around religion, Christianity and the Bible. More detail on this research can be found at biblesociety.org.uk/lumino.

In addition to standard demographic breaks, the results of *Mourning Elizabeth* were available by these eight segments identified in the earlier study. The results are fascinating and we hope to make this analysis publicly available soon. In this report, we have included the 'Dismissive' segment to provide an additional layer to analysis of the 'no religion' group. Just as not all Christians are active and committed churchgoers, so people with no religion show similarly complex and varied attitudes and beliefs. The Dismissive group, sitting at the cooler end of the 'no religion' group, illustrate this complexity and we hope readers will find their inclusion interesting.

Dismissives in summary

People in the Dismissive segment make up about a third of the population. They tend to be younger, politically left-leaning, and slightly more of them are male than female. In the *Mourning Elizabeth* report sample, 91% of people in this group say they have no religion. While there is variation in strength of attitudes, people in this group tend to be particularly cool to religion, Christianity and the Bible. Typically, they will agree with views that religion is harmful, outdated, and should have less influence in society. They are highly likely to be atheist or agnostic and tend to show little interest in spirituality.

Analysis note

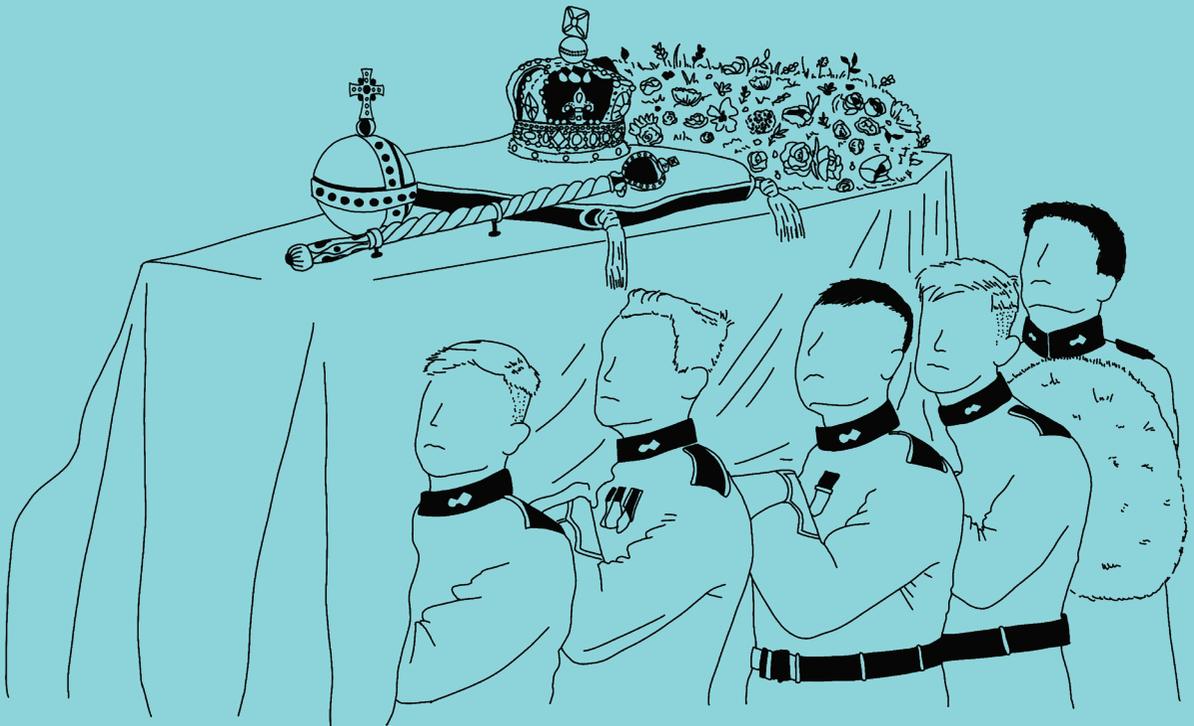
A number of our questions were phrased on a six-part Likert scale comprising of: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree, and Don't Know. Throughout, we have presented analysis with combined values for agree and disagree.

1

Perceptions of the Queen and the monarchy

'To many of us our beliefs are of fundamental importance. For me the teachings of Christ and my own personal accountability before God provide a framework in which I try to lead my life. I, like so many of you, have drawn great comfort in difficult times from Christ's words and example.'

QUEEN ELIZABETH II'



In summary:

- Support for monarchy remains high in England and Wales, with a majority of the population supporting Britain remaining a monarchy in the future. However, age is a factor – the young people in our survey are divided on whether Britain should remain a monarchy or become a republic, with a significant proportion undecided
- Christians are more likely to support remaining a monarchy than those of no religion. Across age groups there was greater warmth towards Queen Elizabeth and the monarchy among churchgoers than among their non-churchgoing peers. Nonetheless, even among non-religious people, a majority support remaining a monarchy
- Queen Elizabeth's public faith was very influential, particularly among churchgoers. Over half of churchgoers (56%) said her life positively influenced how they saw Christianity. Just under half (48%) said she positively influenced how they saw the Church, while 41% said she influenced how they saw the Bible. Among those at a distance from Christianity this influence was much lower
- Queen Elizabeth was highly popular with the public – over two-thirds said they were either 'highly favourable' or 'favourable' to her. Christians and churchgoers were particularly warm, while young people were cooler than average

¹ Elizabeth II, 'Christmas Broadcast 2000' (2000), *The Royal Family* <<https://www.royal.uk/christmas-broadcast-2000>> [accessed 17 February 2023].

The Queen and her faith – what the polls say

The Queen evoked warmth from the public, but religion and age shape the strength of this feeling

Queen Elizabeth was one of the most famous and recognisable women to have lived in the last century and thus no stranger to an opinion poll. Public attitude surveying has been used since the nineteenth century, but it was primarily during the last 30 years of her reign that polls and surveys charted the highs and lows of public opinion on perceptions of the Queen and the institution of the monarchy.

While reflecting both times of celebration such as jubilees and times of challenge, polling has for the most part remained positive to the idea of monarchy and particularly warm to the Queen herself. In 2022, the year of her Platinum Jubilee and the last year of her life, public opinion was reported to be warm and highly favourable to the Queen, with one polling company reporting ‘sky high public approval’.²

In the weeks following the national mourning period, our data indicates warmth towards the Queen continued. Over two thirds (68%) of our sample said they were either ‘highly favourable’ or ‘favourable’ to the Queen, the majority of these describing themselves as highly favourable.³ Just 10% described themselves as either ‘unfavourable’ or ‘highly unfavourable’, and a further 21% as ‘neutral’.

As we can see from chart 1.1 there is variation within demographic groups against this national average. Women reported significantly more favourability than men, with 72% describing themselves as ‘highly favourable’ or ‘favourable’. While a majority of men also said they were in some way favourable to the Queen, this fell under the national average at 63%.

As a combined grouping, people from Black, Asian and other minority ethnic groups reported lower rates of favourability than the national average. Here, just over half of participants said they were in some way favourable to the

68%

of our sample said they were either ‘highly favourable’ or ‘favourable’ to the Queen, the majority of these describing themselves as highly favourable

² Keiran Pedley, and Cameron Garrett, ‘Sky High Public Approval for the Queen Ahead of Platinum Jubilee’ (2022), Ipsos <<https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/sky-high-public-approval-for-the-queen-ahead-of-platinum-jubilee>> [accessed 6 February 2023]. See also Isabelle Kirk, ‘Platinum Jubilee: Where Does Public Opinion Stand on

the Monarchy?’ (2022), YouGov, <<https://yougov.co.uk/topics/society/articles-reports/2022/06/01/platinum-jubilee-where-does-public-opinion-stand-m>> [accessed 06 February 2023].

³ 41% of the sample said they were ‘highly favourable’ and 27% ‘favourable’.

'How favourable, or not, were you towards Queen Elizabeth II?' (shown: sum favourability scores)

Base: All Adults in England & Wales, n=3035

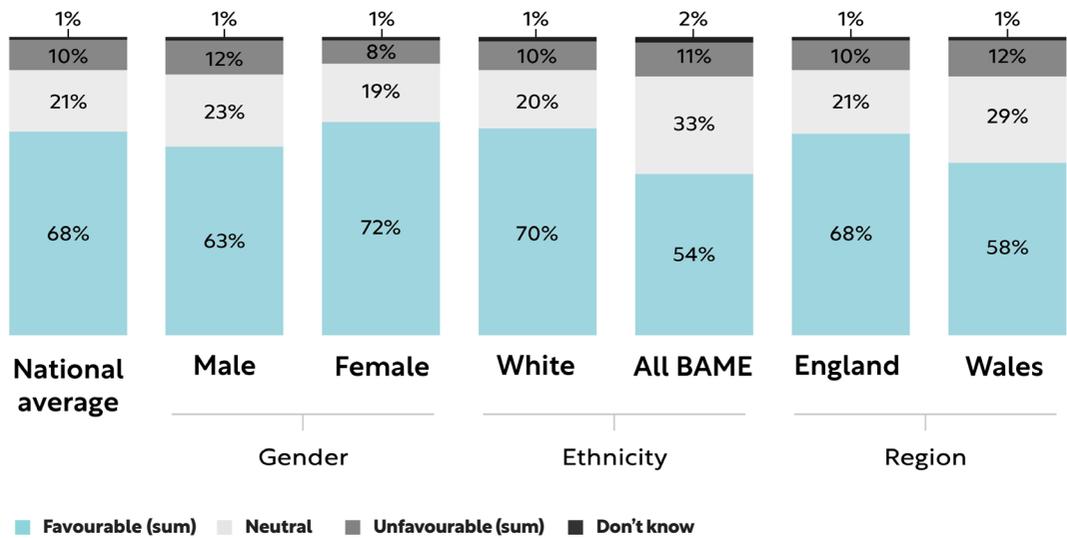


Chart 1.1: Favourability to the Queen by demographic splits

'How favourable, or not, were you towards Queen Elizabeth II?'

Base: Adults in England & Wales, n=3035

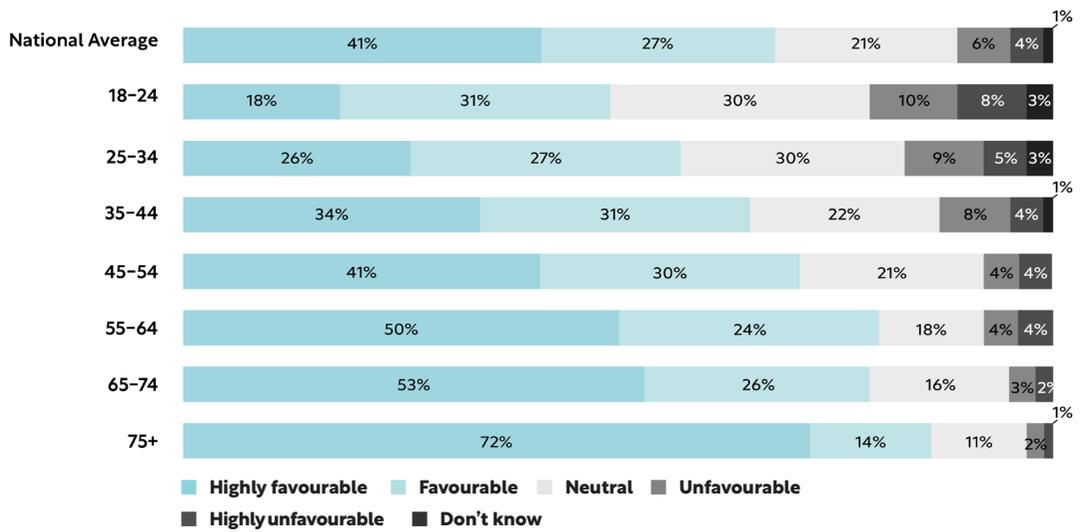


Chart 1.2: Favourability to the Queen by age

'How favourable, or not, were you towards Queen Elizabeth II?'

Base: Adults in England & Wales, n=3035

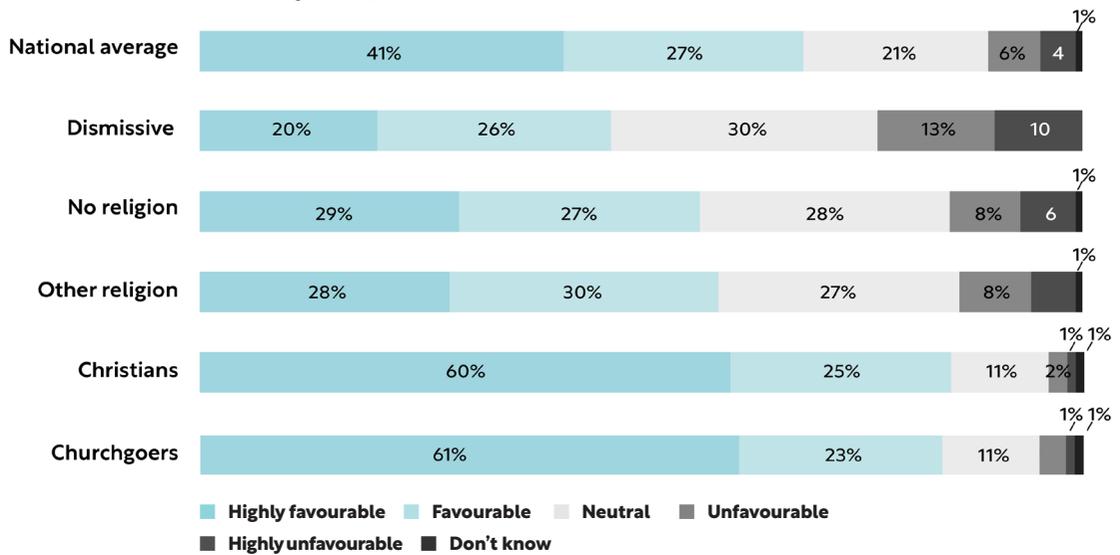


Chart 1.3: Favourability to the Queen by religion/worldview

Queen at 54%. Participants from these groups were not notably more likely than average to say they were unfavourable to the Queen, but rather more of them than average said they were ‘neutral’ at 33%.

By far the most variation within a population group, however, comes from looking at age (chart 1.2). Here we see favourability towards the Queen clearly and dramatically increase within older segments of the population, reflecting a theme to which we will return frequently in this report.

A considerable 86% of participants aged over 75 describe themselves as in some way favourable to the Queen, with the vast majority describing themselves as ‘highly favourable.’⁴ In contrast, under half (49%) of 18–24-year-olds describe themselves as in some way favourable to the Queen. Among both 18–24-year-olds and 25–34-year-olds, strength of favourability is also less marked than in older age groups. Likewise, younger people are more likely than average to describe themselves as ‘neutral’ or in some way unfavourable to the Queen.

Finally, we turn to religion (chart 1.3), the second theme to which we will frequently return. As we will see later in this chapter, Christian affiliation has a remarkable association with warmth towards monarchy in general, but here we see this phenomenon correspond to favourability towards the Queen herself.

Favourability to the Queen is highest among Christians, where 85% describe themselves as in some way favourable, with well over half (60%) describing themselves as ‘highly favourable’. Favourability dips below the national average among both people of other faiths and people with no religion. Among respondents with a faith other than Christianity, 58% describe themselves as in some way favourable, while at 57%, favourability is lowest among people who say they have no religion. For both groups, just over a quarter say they are ‘neutral’ to the Queen. The coolest religious group is the Dismissive group we identified in the introduction. They are more than twice as likely as the national average to describe themselves as in some way unfavourable to the Queen.

The most obvious interpretation of warmth reported by Christians is the age profile of the group. England and Wales have high levels of affiliation to Christian identity, and affiliation is particularly high among older generations. Like other data sets, our survey illustrates this trend – 66% of those aged over 75 describe themselves as Christian, compared to 24% of 18–24-year-olds.⁵

Favourability to the Queen is highest among Christians, where 85% of participants describe themselves as in some way favourable

⁴ 72% said they were highly favourable, 14% favourable, 11% said they were neutral, 2% unfavourable, and 1% highly unfavourable.

⁵ See for example Office for National Statistics, ‘Religion, England and Wales: Census 2021’ (2022),

Gov.uk (Office for National Statistics) <<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/bulletins/religionenglandandwales/census2021>> [accessed 15 February 2023]. Note our figures do not correspond due to different wording.

75%

of churchgoers aged 18-34 describing themselves as in some way favourable to the Queen, compared to 51% of 18-34 year olds as a whole

However, we also see higher than average favourability reports among regular church attending Christians (churchgoers), a much smaller proportion of the sample.⁶ As we can see from table 1.1, 84% of churchgoers describe themselves as in some way favourable to the Queen, far above the national average of 68%. This is intriguing, as within our sample, monthly churchgoing is relatively evenly distributed across age groups, suggesting there may be something about active Christianity and favourability to the Queen that is not simply generational.

Age analysis within the churchgoing subgroup should be treated with caution as the sample size reduces considerably, but with this in mind, we see that this theory is somewhat supported, with 75% of churchgoers aged 18-34 describing themselves as in some way favourable to the Queen, compared to 51% of 18-34-year-olds as a whole. It should be noted, however, that this is still lower than the churchgoing average, suggesting religiosity is not enough to entirely neutralise the effect of age.

⁶ In this report we refer to churchgoers as those who describe themselves as Christian and go to church at least once a month. In this survey, this came to 8% of the sample, which is broadly in line with other self reported polls.

An ambassador for Christianity

An explicitly Christian public figure, the Queen positively impacted the lives of Christians

As monarch, the Queen's role was inexorably bound to Christianity, and in particular, the Church of England. As its supreme governor, she was explicitly responsible for maintaining and preserving the Church of England, and throughout her reign, made it clear this responsibility to faith extended beyond this Church alone.⁷ Religion was not, however, just another ceremonial role for her. Throughout her life, the Queen practised her faith in regular Bible reading, prayer and church attendance, and in her later years in particular spoke increasingly publicly about her deep and personal Christian faith, most notably in her annual Christmas broadcasts.

Here, the Queen often made reference not just to her faith but also to teaching from the Bible. In the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, for example, the Queen referenced the parable of the Good Samaritan, explicit in her view that it is 'as relevant today' as when it was first spoken. To an audience of over 8 million in the UK alone, she concluded 'The teachings of Christ have served as my inner light, as has the sense of purpose we can find in coming together to worship.'⁸

The importance of the Queen as a public communicator of Christianity is illustrated by Catherine Pepinster in her interview with royal reporter and columnist Richard Kay, who reflected:

The Queen's faith is central to her life, and while a lot of people nowadays don't go to church, even at Christmas, they do listen to the Queen, and they hear what she has to say about her faith.

It's still a hugely important part of Christmas, and viewers are looking for something else, something different from politics at this time of year.⁹

As a popular public Christian figure, we were curious to see what influence, if any, the Queen's life had on public perceptions of three elements of the Christian faith – the Bible, Christianity, and the Church.

For the most part, the public report that the Queen's life had no influence on their perceptions of these issues; on the Bible, 79% said there was no influence, on Christianity 71%, and on the Church 73%. Of the minority who said there was an influence, over just one in five (21%) in the sample said the

⁷ See for example, Catherine Pepinster, *Defenders of the Faith: The British Monarchy, Religion, and the Next Coronation* (London: Hodder & Stoughton,

2022), pp. 150–153.

⁸ Elizabeth II (2000).

⁹ Pepinster, p.156.

Those who identify as Christian, however, are far more likely than average to say the life of the Queen did positively influence their perception of these elements of the Christian faith

Queen's life had a positive influence of their perceptions of Christianity, while 18% said the same of the perceptions of the Church. Just 13% said her life had a positive influence on their perception of the Bible. As we would expect, positive influence is generally higher among groups who tend to report favourability to the Queen, particularly older people.¹⁰

Again, we see an intriguing association with active religiosity and reported influence of the Queen's life. Across our statements, very few people with no religion report the Queen's life had any positive influence on their perceptions of Christianity, the Bible, and the Church, although this does not correlate to negative influence either. People from non-Christian faiths similarly follow the national average.

Those who identify as Christian, however, are far more likely than average to say the life of the Queen did positively influence their perception of these elements of the Christian faith. As we can see from chart 1.4, this increases further still among active churchgoers, where between 40% and 56% of the subsample report positive influence, depending on the focus of the statement.

The latter years of the twentieth century were in many ways a challenging period for the Church, particularly the Church of England. From the rise of New Atheism to the continued downward trajectory of church attendance figures and the dramatic shift in religious identity clearly illustrated by a number of census cycles, Christians in the UK have had to adjust to a radically different faith landscape. Constant throughout this has been the Queen. Favourability towards her as a popular but also explicitly public Christian figure might be expected from Christians, particularly those active in their faith, as we saw in the previous section.¹¹

Here, however, we see that this is not just a matter of principle but rather for a significant proportion of churchgoers, the life of the Queen shaped, in some way, their view of their own faith. We cannot know from a survey what level of influence the Queen truly had in this way – that would be a question for the depth and nuance of qualitative research – but here we see the possibility that this part of the Queen's role extended beyond establishment titles and institutions, to inspire and shape individual lives of faith – a Defender of the Faith for the modern period.

¹⁰ One notable exception to this among participants from Black ethnic groups. People in these groups reported below average favourability to the Queen but report high levels of positive influence from the Queen on their perceptions of the Bible, Christianity and the Church. The sample size is small, however, and therefore must be treated with caution.

¹¹ It is interesting to note the Queen's explicitness in communicating her Christian faith increased from 2000 onwards, corresponding with this challenging

time. See Pepinster pp. 154–156 for an analysis of this shift, including an interesting observation from Lord Rowan Williams regarding the affect of secularisation on the Queen's messaging: 'In 1956, say, there would have been a lot more religious scaffolding around. The Queen must be aware of this shift, so in her message, she puts up some of the scaffolding poles herself...She's not aggressively evangelical but she doesn't mince words either.'

'How favourable, or not, were you towards Queen Elizabeth II?'

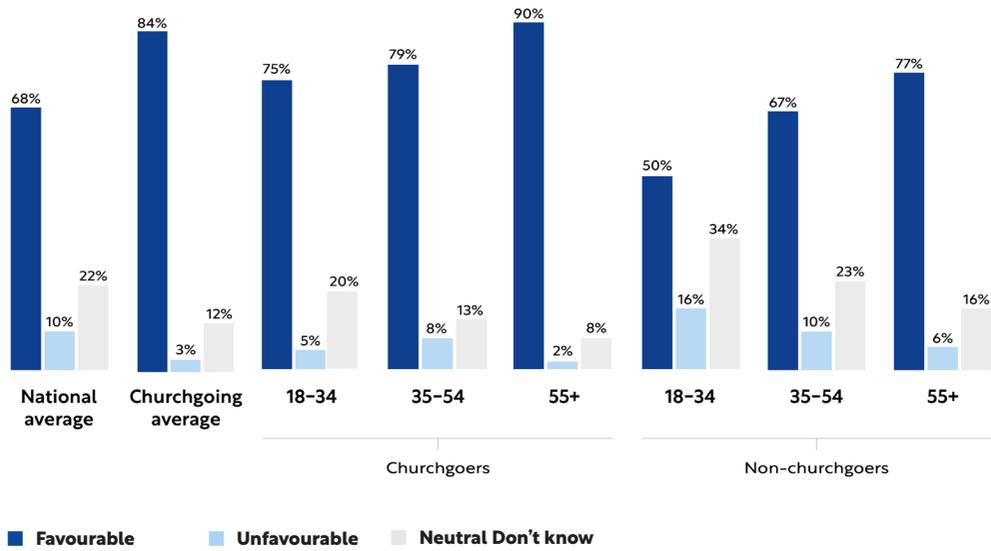


Chart 1.4: Favourability to the Queen by churchgoing and non-churchgoing

'What influence, if any, did the Queen's life have on your perception of The Bible/ Christianity/The Church?' (shown: a positive influence)

Base: Adults in England & Wales, n=3035

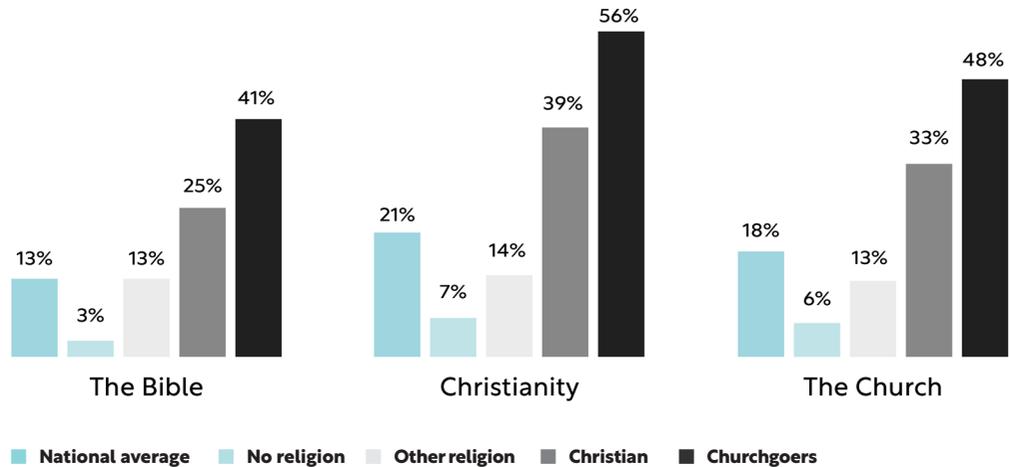


Chart 1.5: Influence of the Queen by religion/worldview

‘Do you think Britain should remain a monarchy with a Queen or King as the head of state or should it become a republic without a Queen or King?’

Base: Adults in England & Wales, n=3035

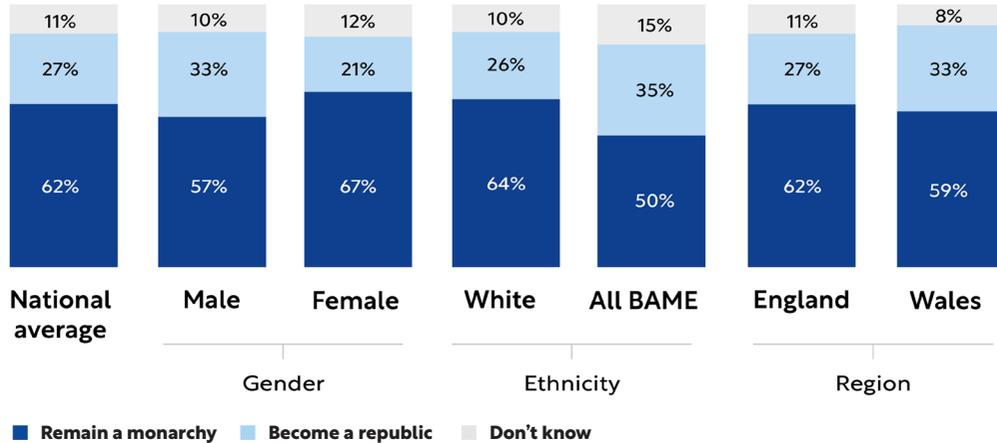


Chart 1.6: Attitudes to monarchy or republic by demographic group

‘Do you think Britain should remain a monarchy with a Queen or King as head of state or should it become a republic without a Queen or King?’

Base: Adults in England & Wales, n=3035

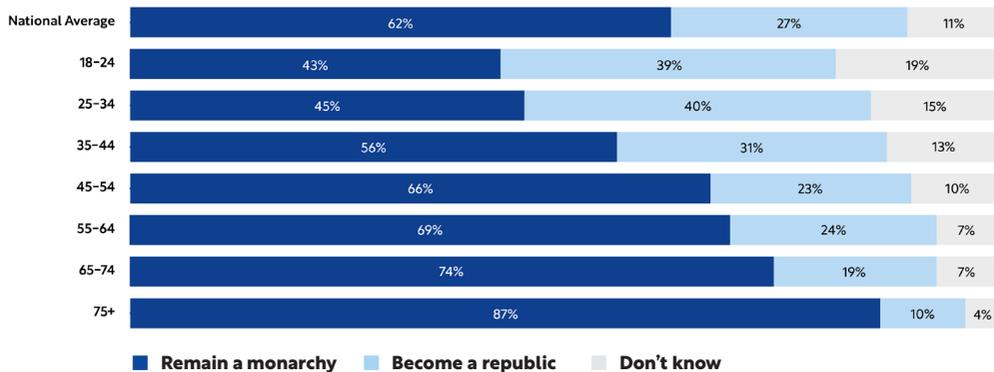


Chart 1.7: Attitudes to monarchy or republic by age

Future of the monarchy

Over half the population want Britain to stay a monarchy, but young people regardless of their religion are more uncertain

Just as surveys have charted shifting attitudes to the Queen as a public figure, there have been numerous polls over recent decades on whether Britain should remain a monarchy or become a republic. While support for the Queen has historically been high, correlating with support for remaining a monarchy, there has been speculation as to whether republican feeling would rise following the passing of her reign. Our survey, polled just six weeks after she died, suggests continued support for the monarchy, but with support for becoming a republic higher than many polls conducted in previous years.¹²

When asked whether Britain should remain a monarchy with a Queen or King as head of state, or become a republic without a Queen or King, the majority of our sample (62%) said remain a monarchy, 27% said become a republic, and 11% say they don't know. Reflecting favourability towards the Queen, variations between groups in the population reflect what we've observed above.

As with favourability to the Queen herself, support for remaining a monarchy is highly associated with both age and religion. A huge majority (87%) of those aged over 75 support remaining a monarchy, with just 10% supporting becoming a republic. In comparison, support for becoming a republic is relatively high among 18–34-year-olds at 40%, with support for remaining a monarchy only marginally higher at 44%. This age group also have the highest rate of 'don't know' at 17%, suggesting support for the continuing institution of the monarchy is far from certain as the twenty-first century continues.

While the relationship between Crown and Church has been much explored and commented on, less is observed about whether personal religiosity reflects how individuals feel about the monarchy in return.

As with favourability to the Queen, support for remaining a monarchy is highly popular among Christians; 80% of them support remaining a monarchy, with just 14% supporting becoming a republic.

¹² 1 See for example, Ipsos Mori, 'Monarchy/Royal Family Trends - Monarchy v Republic 1993–2022' (2022), *Ipsos Mori* <<https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/monarchyroyal-family-trends-monarchy-v-republic-1993-2022>> [accessed 13 February 2023]. Here support for becoming a republic was at 22%, while support for remaining a monarchy was at 68%. Notably, our data shows a dramatic

shift from 2015 where a similarly worded question was asked by Theos in their report *Who wants a Christian coronation?* Here, support for remaining a monarchy was at 70%, and becoming a republic 17%. Data tables available: Theos/ComRes 'Theos - Coronation Polling' (2015), *Theos Think Tank* <https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/cmsfiles/archive/files/Polling/Theos_> [accessed 31 March 2023].

As with favourability to the Queen herself, support for remaining a monarchy is highly associated with both age and religion

79%

**of churchgoers
support Britain
remaining
a monarchy**

Over half (56%) of those with a faith other than Christianity support remaining a monarchy, with just under one in three (32%) supporting becoming a republic. Support for remaining a monarchy is lowest among those who don't have a religion at 50%, with 37% supporting becoming a republic – significantly higher than the national average. Similarly, just over half (51%) of those who say there is probably or definitely not a God (so can be described as atheist or agnostic) support remaining a monarchy, while 37% support becoming a republic. The starkest variation observed is in our Dismissive group, where over half (52%) support becoming a republic, and less than half (39%) remaining a monarchy.

Support for the monarchy is likewise notably high among churchgoers. 79% of churchgoers support Britain remaining a monarchy, compared with 14% who say it should become a republic. While younger churchgoers are broadly inline with the national average in supporting staying a monarchy, they differ from 18-34-year-olds as a whole. Notably, they are more likely to support remaining a monarchy and less likely to support becoming a republic than their non-churchgoing peers.

'Do you think Britain should remain a monarchy with a Queen or King as the head of state or should it become a republic without a Queen or King?

Base: All those who engaged in the funeral events, n=2246

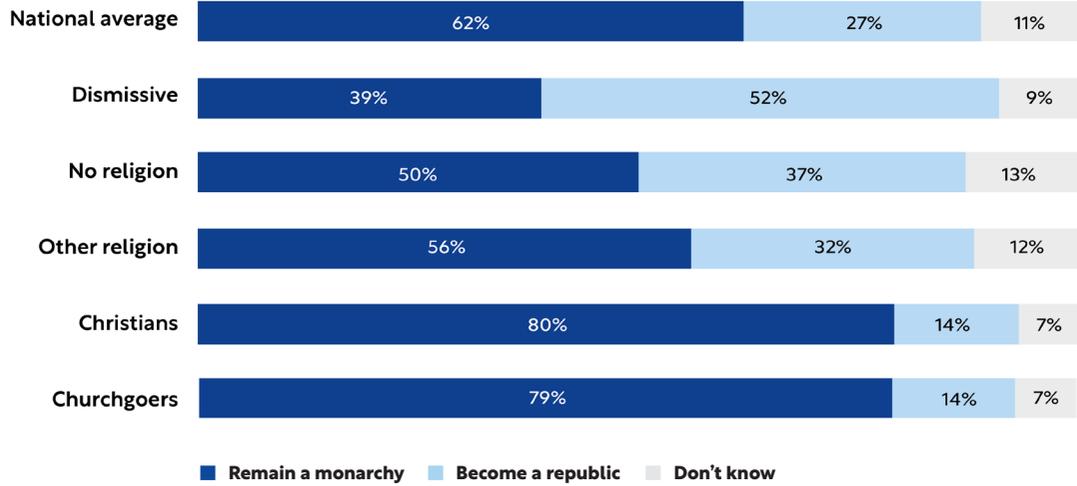


Chart 1.8: Attitudes to monarchy or republic by religion/worldview

Do you think Britain should remain a monarchy with a Queen or King as the head of state or should it become a republic without a Queen or King?

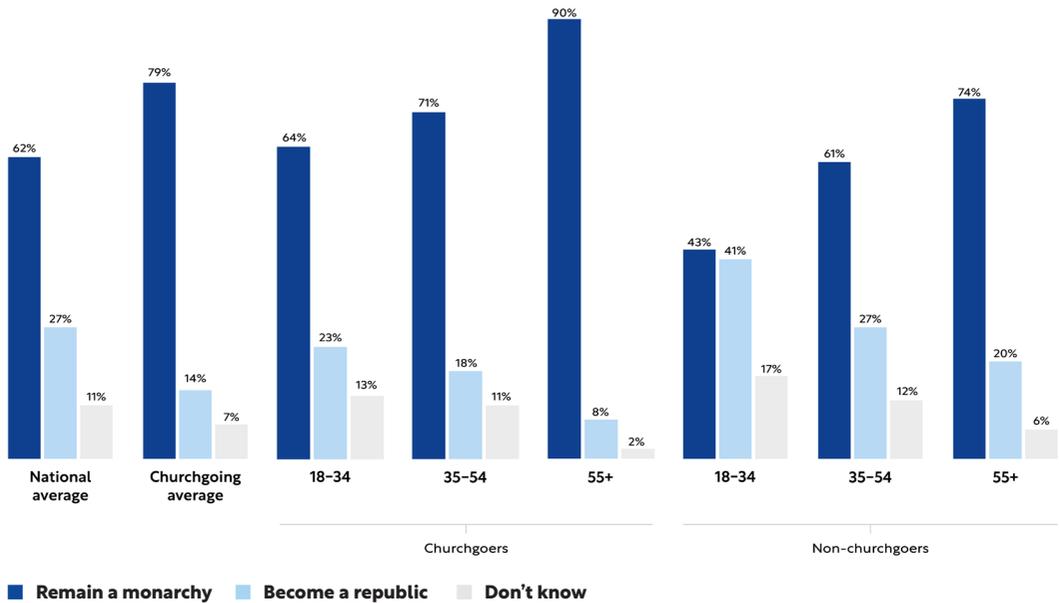


Chart 1.9: Attitudes to monarchy or republic by churchgoing

Concluding reflections

Within this chapter we've seen that favourability to the Queen mirrored warmth to the idea of Britain continuing as a monarchy. Through both questions, we see variation throughout different groups in the population, the most stark being driven by age and religious identity.

Given the close association of monarchy and Church, it is perhaps not surprising that support for the monarchy is lowest among atheists and those with no religion. Nonetheless, monarchists can take comfort that despite the continued shedding of Christianity as a default identity among the population, half of people with no religion support Britain remaining a monarchy, and less than half support becoming a republic. This lends further support to the already established arguments that those who say they have no religion are not a homogenous group, and as we will see throughout this report, cannot be considered hostile to religion in all its forms.

If this shift in religious identity should not cause monarchists concern, then attention will need to be paid to the attitudes and perceptions of those dubbed millennials and Gen Z. Their relative lack of warmth to the monarchy is reflected even among young churchgoers – a group otherwise highly warm to monarchy as a whole. Whether their attitudes will warm in time – as some suggest it could – and whether it will be enough to offset a slow generational shift in attitudes, remains to be seen.¹³

The relationship between Christianity and support for the monarchy is intriguing and complex. Part of this association is undoubtedly driven by age, with older people both more likely to support the monarchy and identify as Christian, regardless of practice. Both, for many older people, come as a package of British identity.

The relationship between support for the monarchy and churchgoing (regardless of age) is harder to untangle. There is much to speculate on here. From the first king of Israel, Saul, to Christ the servant king, the Bible offers many models of kingship, and there are rich conversations to be had for those interested in the idea of sacredness in the role of monarchy. It seems unlikely, however, to be a particularly active conversation in the lives of the ordinary Christians in the Church today. Undoubtedly though, many Christians will be familiar and comfortable with the ideas of the continuity of centuries, tradition and authority, whether overt in Scripture (such as 1 Timothy 2.1–3)

Whatever the driver of the trends observed in this chapter, it is clear the Queen as an individual evoked particularly warm feelings from Christians, both within and beyond the active Church

or infused more subtly throughout the structures of Christian life. Could there also be something experiential or spiritual at play? A comfortableness with a sense of the mystical or sacred present in Christianity, that also runs through the publicly visible ritual and pageantry of royal ceremonies? Or perhaps support for an historical institution that publicly represents what can feel a minority practice in today's society?

Whatever the driver of the trends observed in this chapter, it is clear the Queen as an individual evoked particularly warm feelings from Christians, both within and beyond the active Church. A woman known for her deeply held personal faith as well as her public duty, the Queen was reported by our participants to have positively impacted the lives of Christians throughout England and Wales, influencing the way they perceive their faith. Given that this monarch – the only one most of us have ever known – is indissolubly linked with the idea of monarchy itself, more research will be needed in coming years to observe whether Christian favourability to the institution continues.

¹³ See for example John Curtice, 'King Charles Inherits Crown with Support for Monarchy at Record Low – but Future Not Set in Stone' (2022), *The*

Conversation <<http://theconversation.com/king-charles-inherits-crown-with-support-for-monarchy-at-record-low-but-future-not-set-in-stone-190448>> [accessed 13 February 2023].

2

Engagement with the mourning events

'You're going to hear this wonderful English at its best – also you're going to hear angelic voices of the choir of the Abbey plus the Chapels Royal; you really hear voices that are singing to the glory of God.'

THE RT REVD AND RT HON LORD SENTAMU¹



In summary:

- The vast majority of people in our survey intentionally engaged with at least one of the mourning events for Queen Elizabeth II, with the announcement of the death and the funeral having the highest engagement
- Christians had the highest engagement rates, particularly with the funeral, with a gap of over 20 percentage points between Christians and non-religious people
- The most selected word to describe the mourning events was 'Traditional', perhaps reflecting both the familiar Anglican service and the ancient royal practices
- Those groups who are more positive towards the monarchy were also more likely to have positive perceptions of the mourning events, selecting adjectives such as 'Appropriate' and 'Moving' in contrast to 'Outdated' and 'Excessive'
- Over a quarter of respondents said the mourning events improved their view of the monarchy compared to 14% who said it diminished their view. Again, churchgoers were particularly likely to agree

¹ Harry Mount, 'Late Queen's Funeral Will Be a Deeply Personal Service in the Greatest Church in the Land' (2022), *The Telegraph* <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/royal-family/2022/09/18/late-queens-funeral-will-deeply-personal-service-greatest-church/>> [accessed 7 March 2023].

Setting the scene

The Queen's death and mourning period was a national and global media event unlike any other.

From the moment the news of the Queen's illness broke, around lunchtime on 8 September 2022, both traditional and new media were swept by commentary, speculation, and snapshots of royal family members approaching – and leaving – Balmoral Castle. Her death was announced at 18.30, close to three and a half hours after her passing, across radio, television, newswires, official websites and social media platforms simultaneously, alongside the traditional posting of a physical announcement outside of Buckingham Palace. Over 33 million people watched at least some of the rolling news covering the Queen's illness and death between midday and 2 am, with 11 million watching the moment that Huw Edwards announced her death on the BBC.² The following week saw close to wall-to-wall coverage across all media platforms, including both reflections and documentaries covering the late Queen's life and impact as well as live coverage of official and more spontaneous events. These included the Accession Council, Memorial Services in Edinburgh, Cardiff, and Belfast, the Lying-in-State, and, more unexpectedly, the queue for the Lying-in-State. The week of mourning closed with the funeral events, which reached a peak audience of around 28 million viewers and an average of 26.2 million across the whole event.³

This of course was not the first royal funeral to receive mass media coverage. The funeral of George VI, the Queen's father, had been broadcast around the world on the radio, and while television cameras had captured the grandeur of the funeral procession, they were not allowed within the walls of the chapel. More recently, the funeral of Princess Diana was the second most watched TV event of all time in the United Kingdom with an audience exceeding 30 million. Yet while both were broadcast media events, the death of the Queen was an event of the digital age. Online, the official announcement of her death on Twitter received 2.4 million likes, 86,000 comments, and close to a million retweets globally.⁴ It saw more engagements than any other tweet that week, and beyond this seven out of the top ten tweets that week around the world were related to her passing.⁵ The online space therefore sat alongside traditional media and in-person attendance (whether to events directly or, more likely, wider spaces designated for a mourning public) as a key mode of engagement in the mourning events that surrounded the death of the Queen.

The week of mourning closed with the funeral events, which reached a peak audience of around 28 million viewers

As a result, in our survey we asked which mourning events people engaged with over the course of the week, whether through media or – in the case of the Lying-in-State and the associated queue – in person. As will be seen, the vast majority of our sample engaged with at least some of the events, in particular the funeral and the TV coverage of her passing. But we also explored their perceptions and experiences of the events of the mourning period, what impact this had on their view of the monarchy, and whether this was experienced by any as a ‘spiritual’ event. In both cases we see very similar trends to those identified in the previous chapter, with those groups warmer to the monarchy also more likely to have engaged with the events and also have seen it in more positive terms.

² K.J. Yossman, ‘Over 33 Million People in U.K. Watched Queen Elizabeth II’s Death Announced Live on Television’ (2022) *Variety* <<https://variety.com/2022/tv/global/queen-death-ratings-uk-1235366176/>> [accessed 7 March 2023].

³ BBC News, ‘The Queen’s Funeral Watched by 28 Million Viewers in UK’ (2022), *BBC News* <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-62966616>> [accessed 7 March 2023].

⁴ The Royal Family (Official Twitter Account), ‘The Queen Died Peacefully at Balmoral This Afternoon.

The King and The Queen Consort Will Remain at Balmoral This Evening and Will Return to London Tomorrow’ (2022), *Twitter* <<https://twitter.com/RoyalFamily/status/1567928275913121792>> [accessed 7 March 2023].

⁵ Nicholas Reimann, ‘Queen Elizabeth’s Death Ruled Twitter—But So Did The Trolls’ (2022), *Forbes* <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/nicholasreimann/2022/09/10/queen-elizabeths-death-ruled-twitter-but-so-did-the-trolls/?sh=7bbe98305ef2>> [accessed 7 March 2023].

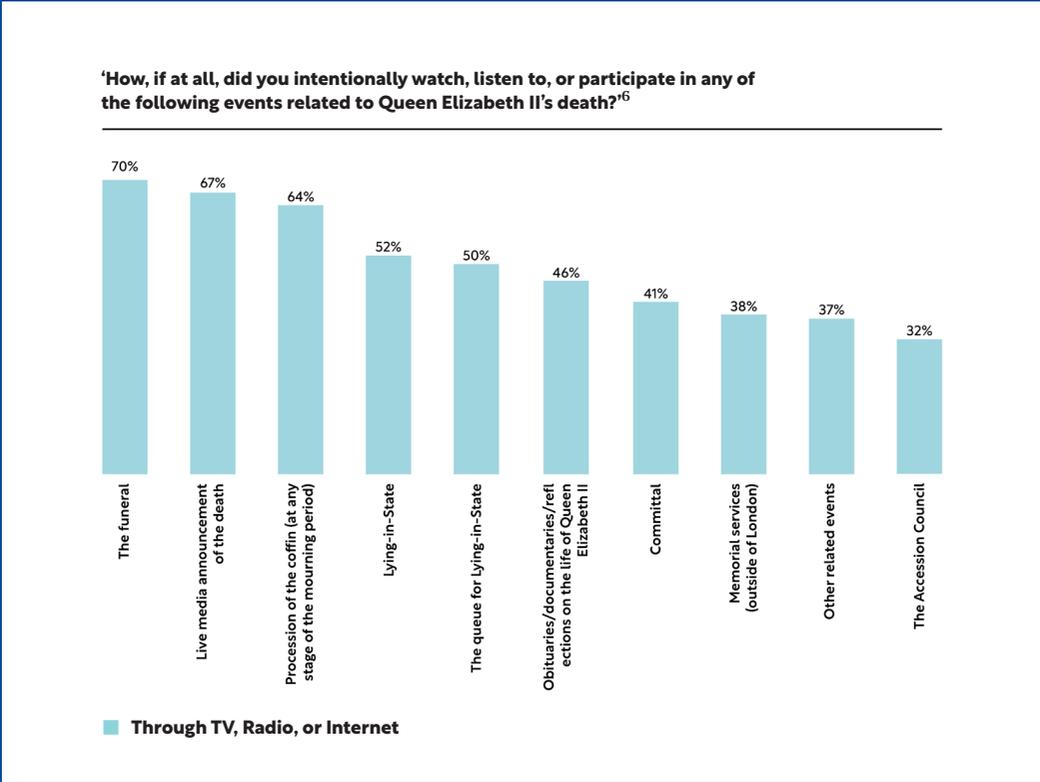


Chart 2.1: Engagement with mourning events across the whole population.

⁶ For these questions, participants had four options: 'In person' (here included in the figures for The Queue

and Lying-in-State); 'TV/radio/internet'; and 'I did not intentionally watch, listen to or participate in this.'

Engagement

Over two-thirds of people engaged with the funeral and announcement of the death.

The scale of coverage across all forms of media meant that exposure to these events was nearly inevitable, but we wanted to ensure that we were capturing intentional engagement. As a result, we asked respondents whether they had intentionally watched, listened to, or otherwise participated in any of the events over this period – whether through broadcast or digital media. We found that a considerable majority of people, across all demographic groups, engaged with at least one of these events.

There are two clear moments that stand out in Chart 2.1 – the announcement of the death itself and the funeral the following week, which was preceded and followed by a procession of the coffin. Our data shows that around 70% of the population intentionally engaged with these events in some form, and there is perhaps not as much difference across demographic groups as might be expected.

There are, of course, differences between the groups, as Chart 2.2 shows. Women were more likely to engage than men, and there is a positive correlation between age and engagement. White people were more engaged than any other ethnic group. However, the starkest difference is seen in religious identity. At over 80%, those who identified as Christians were more likely than any other group we identified to have engaged with the funeral. In contrast, 61% of non-religious people engaged in the funeral – a gap of over twenty percentage points to Christians. This gap grows further when we look at Dismissives, with only slightly over half engaging with the funeral.

Despite these differences, across every group here we see at least half (and in most cases 60%) of people watching or listening to the funeral across different media. This is a remarkable level of engagement that clearly goes beyond the initial TV ratings. Likewise with immediate coverage surrounding the Queen's illness and death, every demographic group listed above saw over 50% engagement – with the same religious trends emerging here, albeit with a smaller difference between the highly engaged Christian group and the less engaged non-religious group.

As this report is specifically focusing on these mourning events, many of the questions in the survey were only asked to those who actively engaged in at least one of these events.

70%

of the population intentionally engaged with these events in some form, and there is perhaps not as much difference across demographic groups as might be expected

Engagement with the Funeral

Base: all adults in England & Wales, n=3035

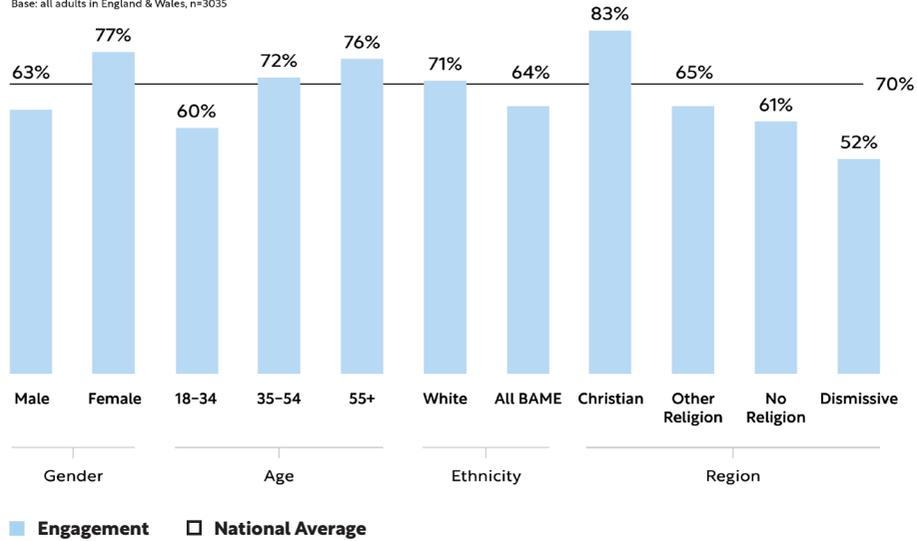


Chart 2.2: Engagement with the State Funeral by demographic group.

Perception of the Mourning Period

Base: Adults in England & Wales, n=3035

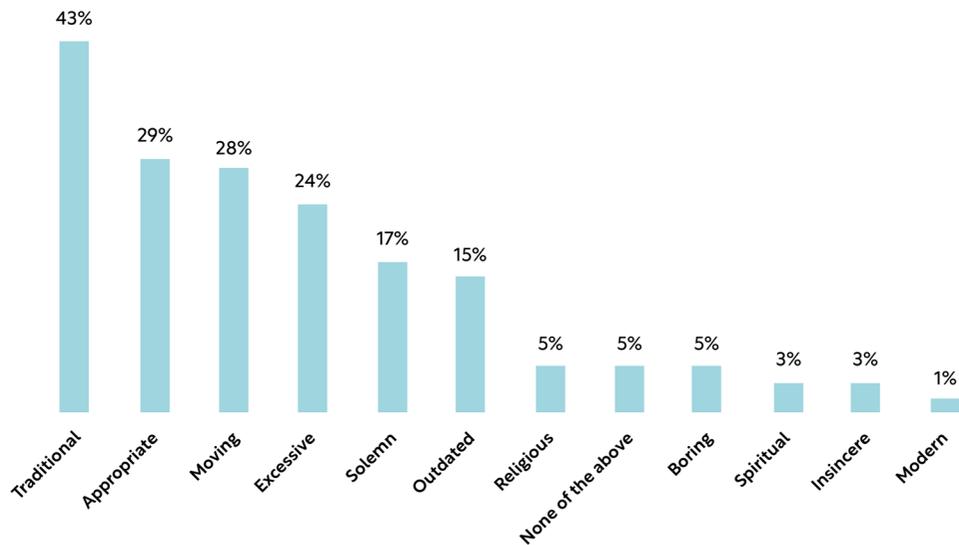


Chart 2.3: Perceptions of the Mourning Period. Respondents were able to select up to two options.

Perceptions

The funeral events were seen – particularly by those warmer groups – as traditional, appropriate, and moving.

Given the scale of the coverage, we felt able to ask all respondents what they thought about the mourning period as a whole. To do this we offered participants 11 different adjectives (alongside ‘None of the above’) from which they could select the two that they believed most fitting to describe the entire period (see chart 2.3).

Looking across the demographic breakdown we often see similar trends to those identified in the previous section (see chart 2.4). Those more likely to have had higher engagement – women, older people, white people, English people, and Christians – were also more likely to have considered the ceremonials ‘appropriate’ and, in particular, ‘moving’. In turn, they were less likely to have identified these as ‘excessive’. While these are not direct opposites, presenting them together allows us to see the trends across demographic groups – and how they reflect the trends discussed above. Again, the starkest difference is seen in the religious categories; however, non-religious people are slightly more likely than people with a faith other than Christianity to consider the events ‘moving’.

Looking at the other descriptors, the two elements that most strongly track the trend seen for ‘Moving’ are ‘Appropriate’ and, interestingly, ‘Traditional’. In the graph above we have identified ‘Traditional’ as a neutral statement, but the clear correlation with other trends suggests this was largely seen as a positive trait among respondents. When we look at Christians, for example – the group most favourable to the monarchy and most engaged with the events – close to half selected the term traditional, significantly higher than other religious and non-religious groups.

Staying with the religious aspect, it is interesting to note a relatively low response for both ‘Spiritual’ and, perhaps more surprisingly given the prominence of Anglican liturgical practice in the ceremonies, ‘Religious’. Only 5% of respondents selected this option, and even among Christians it only reached 7%. As we only allowed two selections per response this does not mean that people did not think it was religious at all, but rather that it was not their overriding impression of the events.

The fact that ‘Traditional’ is comfortably the most selected option – and the fact that this appears to have been viewed largely as a positive thing (especially

Those more likely to have had higher engagement – women, older people, white people, English people, and Christians – were also more likely to have considered the ceremonials ‘appropriate’ and, in particular, ‘moving’

This would have evoked in many viewers memories of funerals of their own loved ones; and more poignantly still, the unformed memories of the un-held funerals of loved ones who died during the pandemic

as the perhaps comparable but clearly negative ‘Outdated’ only received 15%) gives an interesting insight into the wider expectations of royal ritual. As will be explored in Chapter 4, at the heart of the funeral ceremony was the liturgical structure (including set Bible readings) taken from the 1662 Book of Common Prayer, a service that has defined Anglican funerals for over 350 years – from paupers to Queens. This would have evoked in many viewers memories of funerals of their own loved ones; and more poignantly still, the unformed memories of the un-held funerals of loved ones who died during the pandemic. Alongside the familiar would have been elements of royal practice that, while previously unseen to the public (such as the breaking of the wand at the Committal Service), would still have felt deeply traditional to viewers. This is not to say there was not significant innovation in the proceedings – a sermon had not been preached at a royal funeral, for example, for more than three centuries prior to the Queen Mother’s funeral in 2002⁷, and while the funeral of the Queen in Westminster Abbey may have felt natural and part of historic tradition, she was in fact the first monarch to have their funeral at the Abbey since 1760. Likewise, in the funeral itself there were aspects that were deeply personal to the Queen. The choir’s performance of the Russian Kontakion, with its roots in Russian Orthodox liturgy of grief and the inclusion of senior representatives of a range of Christian denominations in prayers and non-Christian religious communities in the procession, were unprecedented in the funerals of British monarchs.⁸ This decision reflected the Queen’s personal commitment to Christian ecumenism and interfaith relationships. The lack of exposure to the funerals of previous sovereigns meant that these innovations were easy to overlook, however, and thus the elements of ecclesiastical and royal tradition were able to remain most visible.

⁷ Matthias Range, *British Royal and State Funerals: Music and Ceremonial Since Elizabeth I* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2016), p.308. At Princess Diana’s funeral a eulogy had been delivered by her brother.

⁸ Harriet Sherwood, ‘We Will Meet Again: Christian Themes at Heart of Welby’s Funeral Sermon’ (2022), *The Guardian* <<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/sep/19/justin-welby-sermon-queen-funeral>> [accessed 7 March 2023].

'Moving' and 'Excessive'

Base: Adults in England & Wales, n=3035

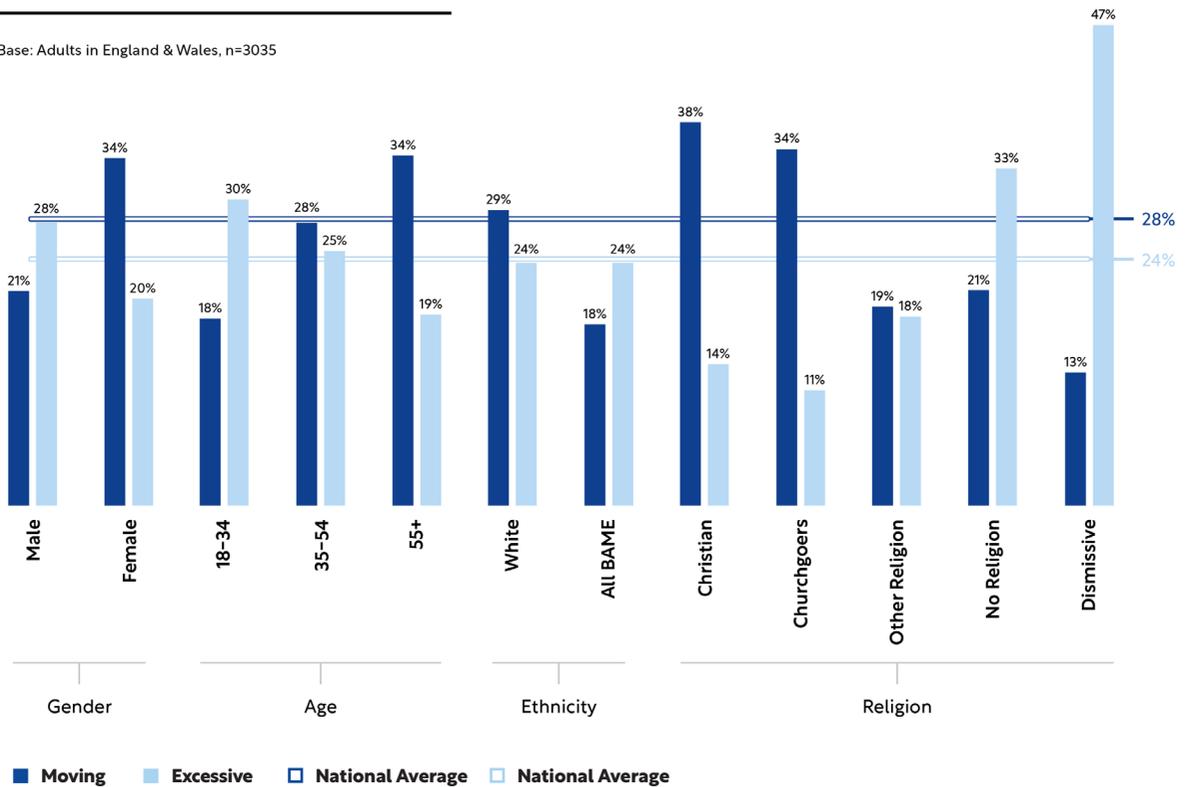


Chart 2.4: Perceptions of the mourning period as 'Moving' and 'Excessive' by demographic group.

How, if at all, did the official mourning period affect your feeling towards the monarchy?

Base: Adults in England & Wales, n=3035

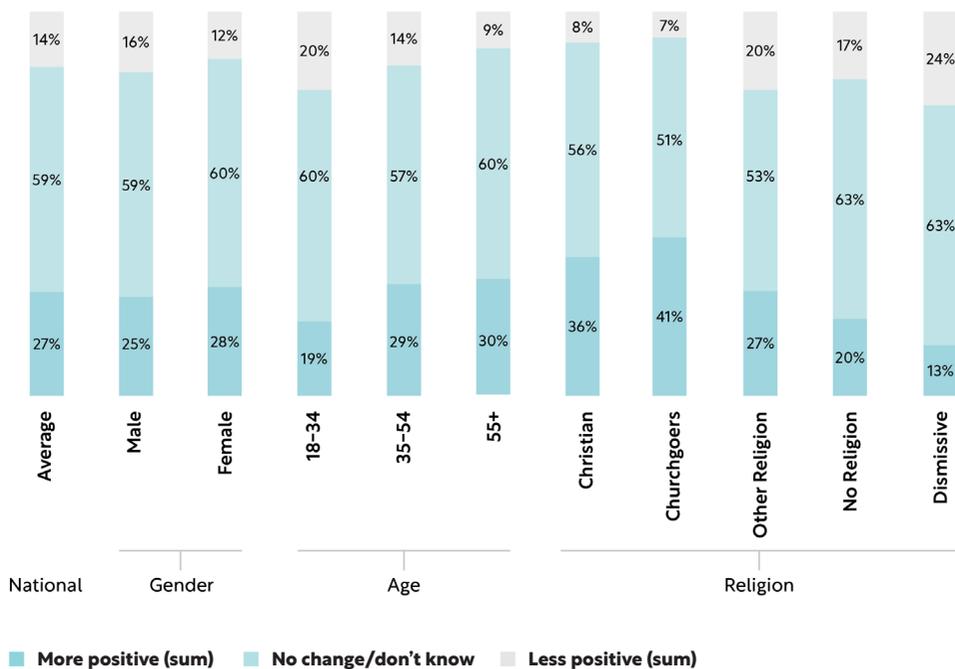


Chart 2.5: Impact of the official mourning period on feelings towards the monarchy across demographic groups.

Impact on perceptions of the monarchy

While most felt no impact, on the whole people were almost twice as likely to say it had a positive impact than a negative one, aside from those coolest to religion.

Later in the report we will dig deeper into how the experience of the mourning period affected people's attitudes towards Christianity, the Church, and the Bible, but here we want to address the impact that the events had on attitudes to the monarchy.

As Chapter 1 outlined, attitudes towards the monarchy are relatively popular in general positive, with over two-thirds of the population viewing the Queen herself favourably (Chart 1.1) and 62% believing Britain should remain a monarchy (Chart 1.5). However, as with other areas explored in this chapter these were not consistent across all demographics, and age and religion in particular appeared to be key factors. When looking at the impact the mourning period had on perceptions of the monarchy (Chart 2.5) we see similar trends.

Starting with the overall picture, while close to six in ten said the period had no effect, the fact that over a quarter of all adults said that it had a positive effect on their feelings towards the monarchy is notable as it is twice the level of those who said it had a negative effect. However, this is not universal.

Looking at the age differences we see that the youngest group are in fact slightly more likely to say that it had a negative impact on their perception of the monarchy than a positive one. In contrast, 35–54s are twice as likely to say it had a positive effect and this rises to three times as much among those aged over 55. Likewise, we see a much higher than average level of positive change among Christians and, in particular, churchgoers, with 41% of the latter group reporting a positive change and only 7% reporting a negative change. While those from other religions and no religion as a whole are still slightly more likely to say it had a positive effect than a negative one (albeit again with more than half in both cases saying it had no impact), when we look at Dismissives, the coolest end of the religious scale, we see that they are almost twice as likely to say it had a negative impact as a positive one.

The youngest group are in fact slightly more likely to say that the mourning period had a negative impact on their perception of the monarchy than a positive one

One in five under-35s and one in three Dismissives referred to the events as 'Outdated' compared to only 15% of the population as a whole

Three other findings from this research can perhaps offer some illumination of these trends. Firstly, with regards to young people in particular, as outlined already in this chapter the term most frequently applied to the events was 'Traditional', an aspect which may have been more alienating to younger audiences. This idea is perhaps reinforced by the fact that one in five under-35s and one in three Dismissives referred to the events as 'Outdated' compared to only 15% of the population as a whole, while these two groups were also far more likely to see the events as 'Excessive', as shown in Chart 2.4. Given these negative perceptions of the events it is unsurprising that this also contributed towards a more negative perception of the institution symbolised in the events. Secondly, in relation in particular to the responses of Dismissives here, as the following chapters will outline the Bible, the Church, and Christianity were central and unavoidable through these events. This is likely to have been offputting to those who are coolest to religion as a whole, and thus again unsurprising that it would leave a negative impact on these audiences. Finally, alongside the religious emphasis in the ceremonies, the events naturally also placed great symbolic emphasis on the monarchy. As a result, it is again perhaps unsurprising that those who were already cooler towards the monarchy did not find the mourning period to have a positive impact on these feelings.

Concluding reflections

These events, and in particular the coverage of the Queen's illness and passing and her State Funeral, drew an enormous level of engagement across all demographics. Around 7 in 10 of our respondents said they had engaged in the events through television, radio, or online platforms. This would equate to over 41 million people across England and Wales, indicating that the death of the Queen was not only momentous in terms of the history of the nation, but as a unique public and broadcasting event. Even beyond the two largest events we see at least 30% of the population in some way intentionally following each of the elements we explored. Other than the final burial ceremony, these were events for the whole nation, as well as the extended commonwealth and world. For the first time in history the funeral of a British monarch was not only heard but seen around the world, with highlights, commentary, and even jokes shared around the world in seconds through social media.

Yet this was far from consistent across the population – and there are clear trends when we dig deeper into the demographic data, reflected not only in how likely they were to engage in the mourning events, but also how they perceived them. Respondents who were female, white, older, based in England, and (importantly) Christian were noticeably more likely to both intentionally engage in the first place consider the events both 'Appropriate' and 'Moving'. As just outlined, they were also more likely to be drawn to the term 'Traditional' – seemingly viewing this as a positive attribute. In contrast, respondents who were generally cooler to religion and the monarchy were less likely to follow the events overall, and more likely to have considered them 'Excessive' and 'Outdated'. Despite these trends, even among the most sceptical groups we still see over half of them engaging with the funeral. What's more, people were significantly more likely to say the mourning period had a positive effect on their view of the monarchy than a negative one.

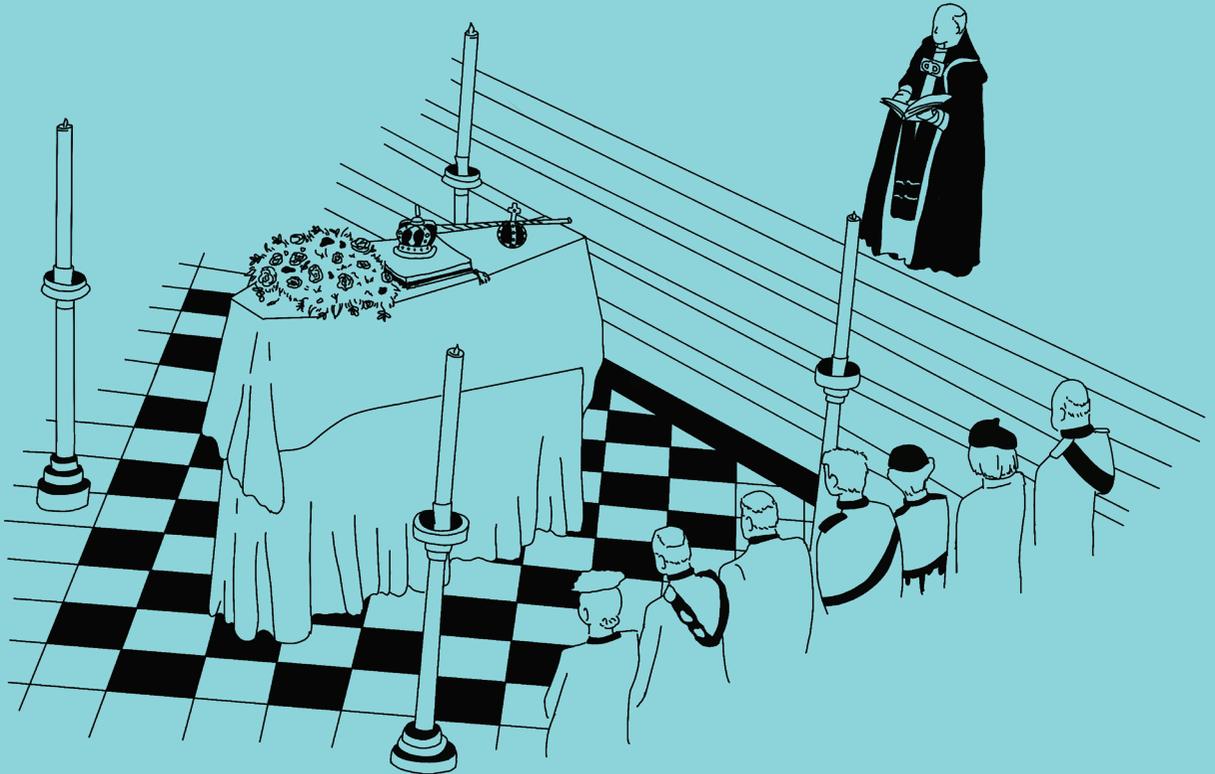
While few peoples specifically identified these events as 'religious', the identification with tradition nevertheless points towards the fact that these events were woven through with Anglican ritual and liturgy – with the Bible at the heart of this. Through the course of these events, the tens of millions of viewers encountered deeply religious and scriptural elements on a scale beyond anything previously seen in Britain. It is this aspect to which we turn our attention now.

3

The Bible: presence and perceptions

'We present you with this Book, the most valuable thing that this world affords.'

ARCHBISHOP GEOFFREY FISHER, 1953, ON THE PRESENTATION OF A BIBLE TO QUEEN ELIZABETH II AT THE CORONATION



In summary:

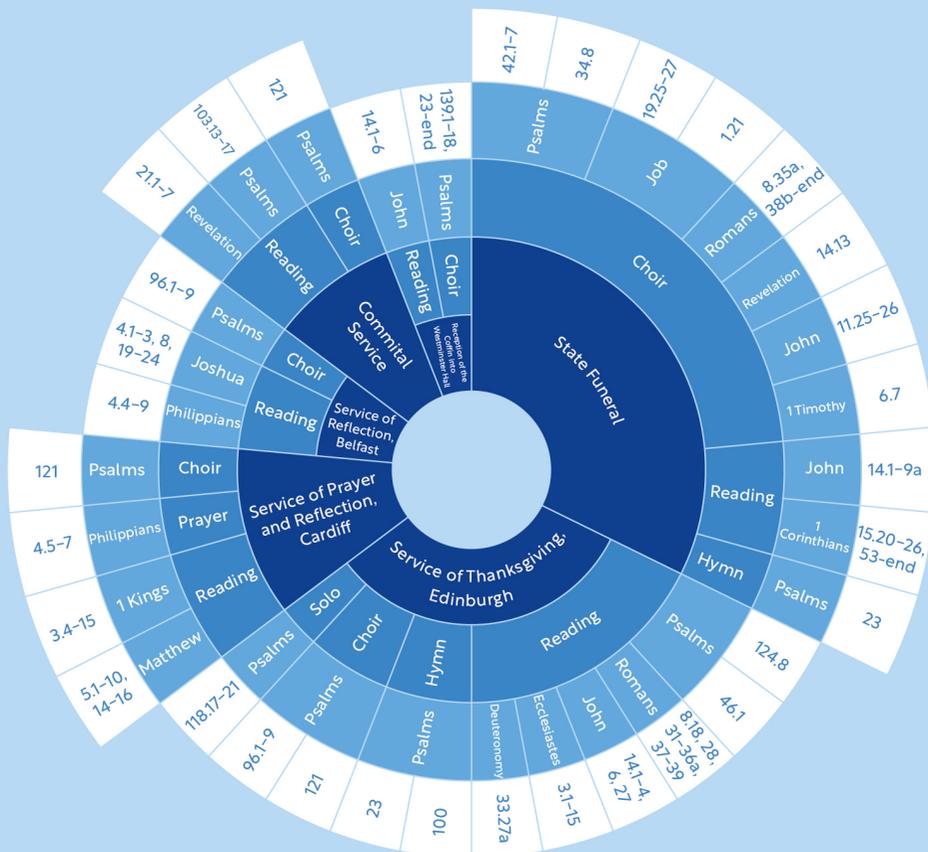
- The events of the funeral and mourning period were moments of unprecedented Bible exposure in British history. Just over a quarter of adults who engaged in the Funeral events heard parts of the Bible they'd not heard before, rising to 40% of 18–24-year-olds. The breadth and depth of Scripture presented was such that it formed a unique moment of public Bible communication
- Around a third of those who watched the Funeral events found the Bible readings to be personally relevant and moving. This is far greater than the proportion of people who go to church regularly, demonstrating the ability of the Bible to speak effectively beyond those closest to it
- While Christians showed the warmest reception to the Bible, a strong minority of people from faiths other than Christianity also found the Bible passages to be moving and relevant to their feelings at the time
- However, a significant proportion of those who engaged with the Funeral events said they found the Bible readings difficult to understand, boring, and not relevant to their feelings at the time. These responses were strongest among young people and those from non-Christian faiths
- Equally, while people with no religion did not report finding the Bible difficult to understand, they were more likely than average to find the passages boring, and less likely to find them moving or relevant to their feelings. There is need and opportunity to support these groups with Bible accessibility both in national state events such as the coronation, and in smaller local moments like weddings and funerals

The funeral of Queen Elizabeth II

The funeral of Queen Elizabeth II marked a truly unique and unprecedented moment of public scripture in the modern age. While still intricately woven through the English language in phrases, imagery, and poetry, the Bible has become increasingly seen as a private document, one for Christians to use within their own communities and in their private lives, and with little to say to our wider society at large. In events of the funeral and mourning period, Scripture was spoken by politicians, sung by world class musicians and ordinary people alike, prayed by congregations, and chosen by a Queen. Transmitted around the

world, the Bible was given a global platform to speak on behalf of the nation. In the following pages we explore how a public increasingly at a distance from the Bible in everyday life received these words, but here we explore breath of scripture presentation through images.

If someone watched all of the official mourning events they would have heard 3,923 words of the Bible, forming 198 verses, drawn from 13 books of the Bible, in three languages – English, Welsh and Gaelic.



Reading Choir Prayer Hymn Solo

Service of Reflection, Belfast (13/09/22)

- Joshua 41-3, 8, 19-24
- Philippians 4.4-9
- Psalm 96.1-9
- Matthew 6.9-13

Reception of the coffin into Westminster Hall (15/09/22)

- John 14.1-6
- Psalm 139.1-18, 23-end
- Matthew 6.9-13

Service of Prayer and Reflection, Cardiff (16/09/22)

- 1 Kings 3.4-15
- Matthew 5.1-10, 14-16
- Psalm 121
- Philippians 4.5-7
- Matthew 6.9-13

Service of Thanksgiving, Edinburgh (12/09/22)

- Deuteronomy 33.27a
- Ecclesiastes 31-15
- Romans 8.18, 28, 31-36a, 37-39
- John 14.1-4, 6, 27
- Psalm 124.8
- Psalm 46.1
- Psalm 121
- Psalm 116
- Matthew 6.9-13
- Psalm 100
- Psalm 23
- Psalm 118.17-21

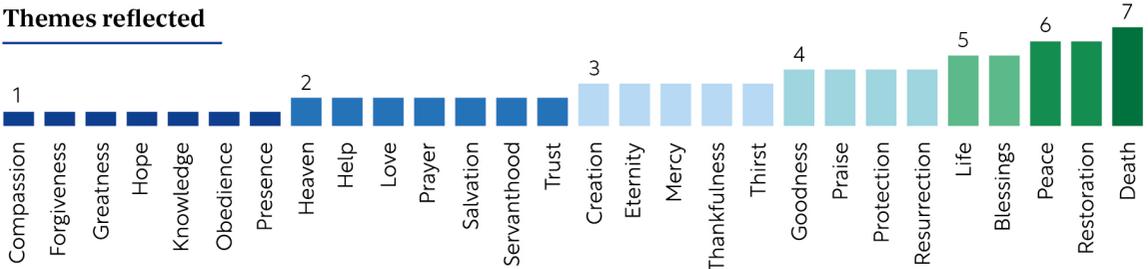
State Funeral (19/09/22)

- 1 Corinthians 15.20-26, 53-end
- John 14.1-9a
- John 11.25-26
- 1 Timothy 6.7
- Job 1.21
- Revelation 14.13
- Job 19.25-27
- Psalm 34.8
- Psalm 42.1-7
- Romans 8.35a, 38b-end
- Matthew 6.9-14
- Psalm 23

Committal Service (19/09/22)

- Psalm 103.13-17
- Revelation 21.1-7
- Psalm 121
- Matthew 6.9-13

Themes reflected



Our figures are drawn from how the Bible is presented in Order of Service documents where possible. Where this is not available we have used King James Version for Bible verses. All Scripture passages have been translated into English and are counted once.

Ancient words, new audience

The Bible reached new audiences in the Funeral events, and for most, it was not difficult to understand

The Bible permeated the events of the national mourning period. If someone watched all the official events they would have heard 3,923 words of the Bible, forming 198 verses, drawn from 13 books across the Old and New Testament. The Bible featured 11 times in the State Funeral alone, and a further three times in the Committal Service. Such was the breadth of coverage that over a quarter (29%) of our survey participants who engaged with the final events of the mourning period¹ agreed with the statement ‘I heard parts of the Bible I’d not heard before’. For young people this was even higher, with 40% of 18–24-year-olds agreeing with this statement, marking the significance of this occasion for sharing the Bible to a new generation (see Chart 3.1). Intriguingly for Bible communicators and church leaders, one in five (19%) of churchgoers also said they’d heard parts of the Bible they’d not heard before (see Chart 3.2).

The Bible translation used in the services was the King James Version, famed for its influence on the English language and familiar to many in British culture, particularly those of older generations. Despite this, it is far from the most accessible translation available, and many will be increasingly unfamiliar with its distinct style.

We asked those in our sample who had engaged with the Funeral events to what extent they agreed with the statement ‘The Bible readings were difficult to understand’. Just 14% of the sample agreed with this, with a further 42% actively disagreeing. These figures were broadly reflected across many demographic groups, including gender, region, and socio-economic grouping. People from Black, Asian and other minority ethnic groups were a little more likely than average to say the Bible readings were difficult to understand at 19%.

On religion (see Chart 3.2), we generally see little agreement that the Bible readings were difficult to understand from both Christians and non-religious people, including those particularly cool to the religion – the Dismissive group. Agreement with the statement was only notably high among people of other religious faiths, at 26%.

If someone watched all the official events they would have heard 3,923 words of the Bible, forming 198 verses, drawn from 13 books across the Old and New Testament

¹ In this survey, this is participants who intentionally engaged with regional memorial events, the state funeral and/or committal service, through television,

radio, internet, or in person. This subsample is referred to throughout this chapter as the Funeral events.

'I heard parts of the Bible I'd not heard before' (shown: agree)

Base: All those who engaged in the funeral events, n=2246

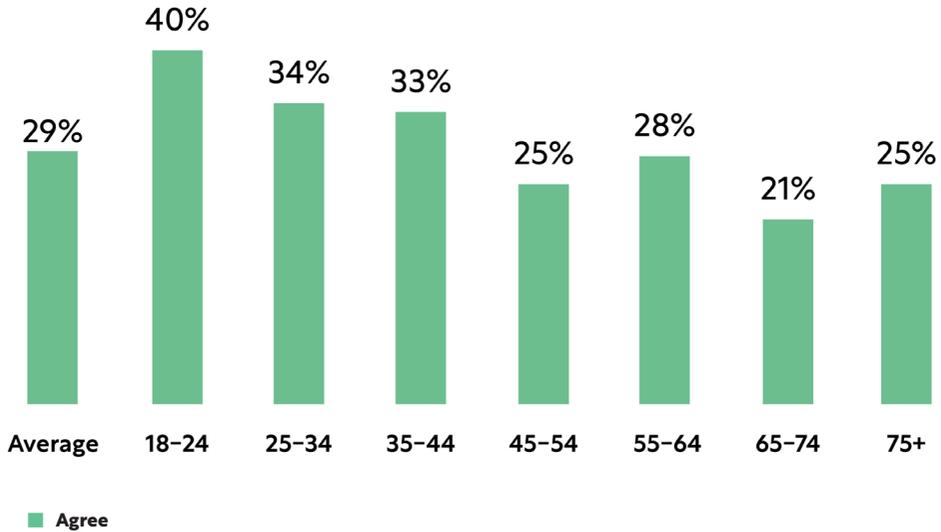


Chart 3.1: 'I heard parts of the Bible I'd not heard before' (agree) by age

'The Bible readings were difficult to understand'

Base: All those who engaged in the funeral events, n=2246

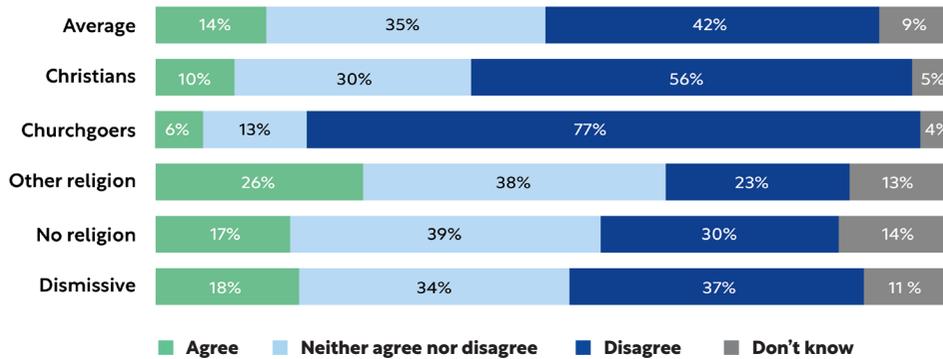


Chart 3.2: 'The Bible readings were difficult to understand' by religion/worldview

'The Bible readings were difficult to understand'

Base: All those who engaged in the funeral events, n=2246

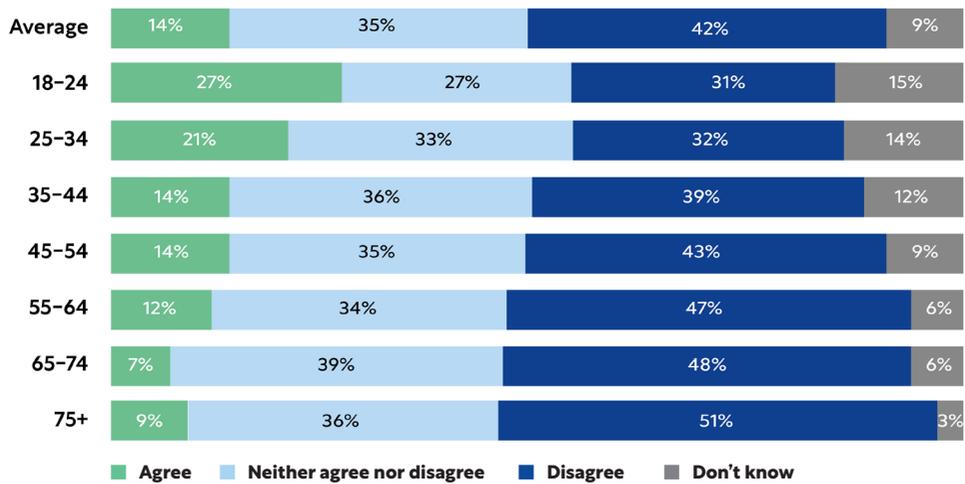


Chart 3.3: Those who agree 'The Bible readings were difficult to understand' (all responses) by age

As we can see from chart 3.2, there is more variation on active disagreement. Both Christians as a whole and churchgoers show strong levels of disagreement, while for non-religious people this is more muted. It is also interesting to note disagreement in the Dismissive group is only a little below the subsample average. Faith (or, indeed lack of) does therefore not seem to have affected understanding of the Bible on the whole, even if it did affect the strength of feeling.

Probably reflecting generational shifts in familiarity with the Bible (particularly the King James Version), we see considerable variation among different age groups (see Chart 3.3). Older people in the sample were more likely than average to disagree the Bible readings were difficult to understand, while young people were significantly more likely to agree that they were. This was particularly notable among 18–24-year-olds, where over a quarter of participants (27%) agreed.

Both Christians as a whole and churchgoers show strong levels of disagreement, while for non-religious people this is more muted

Reception of the Bible

Overall, reception of the Bible was more positive than negative – a third found the passages moving, while a quarter found them boring – but age and distance from Christianity flip this trend

To assess how the public received the Bible presented in the Funeral events, we asked participants in our survey whether they agreed or disagreed with two statements. One was framed negatively – ‘Overall, I found the Bible readings boring’ and the other positively – ‘Overall, I found the passages chosen for Bible readings moving’. Capturing the reception of one element of a complex, long and emotionally charged event is fraught with challenge and these statements are imperfect instruments to do so. Nonetheless, we felt these broadly opposing dimensions would capture sufficient sentiment to suggest whether the Bible was received positively or negatively overall.

Turning first to whether the participants found the Bible readings boring (Chart 3.4), a quarter (25%) of the subsample as a whole said that they did. More – just over a third (34%) – disagreed, while a further 34% said they neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. On whether participants found the Bible readings moving (Chart 3.5), 33% agreed they did, 15% disagreed, while the largest proportion of the sample (42%) said they neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement.

The high ‘neither’ responses are intriguing here. It could be the participants could not recall the Bible clearly enough to fairly answer the question. Nonetheless, on both statements we see negativity to the Bible readings to be a minority position, and approximately a third of the subsample showing emotional warmth to what they heard.

As with previous chapters, by far the starkest variations within the subsample are in age and religion. Suggesting an interesting reflection to the responses on whether the Bible passages were difficult to understand, young people were significantly more likely than older people to say they found the Bible readings boring. 39% of 18–34-year-olds agreed with the statement compared to 16% of over 55s (see Chart 3.6). Conversely, 41% of over 55s said they found the Bible readings moving, compared to 24% of 18–34-year-olds (see Chart 3.7).

On both statements we see negativity to the Bible readings to be a minority position, and approximately a third of the subsample showing emotional warmth to what they heard

'Overall, I found the Bible readings boring' (Shown: Agree and Disagree)

Base: All those who engaged in the funeral events, n=2246

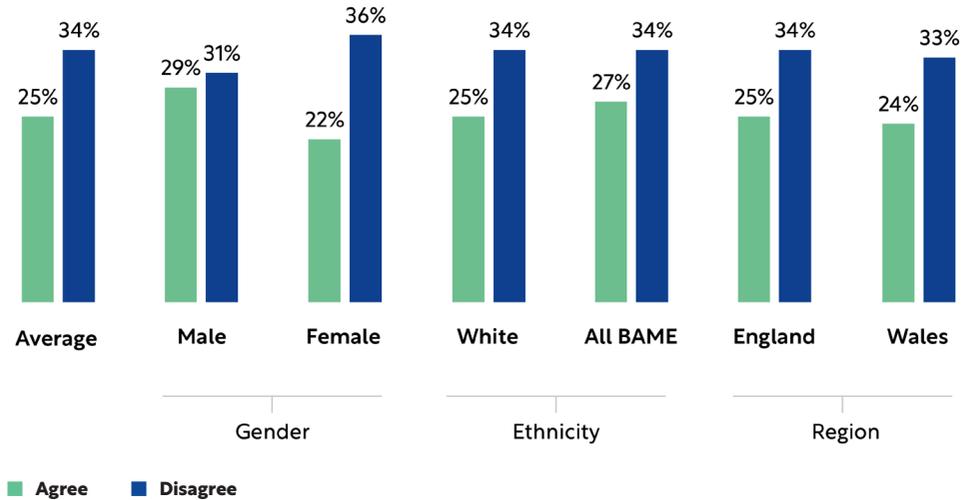


Chart 3.4: 'Overall, I found the Bible readings boring' (agree/disagree) by demographic group

'Overall, I found the passages chosen for Bible readings moving' (Shown: Agree and Disagree)

Base: all those who engaged in the funeral events, n=2246

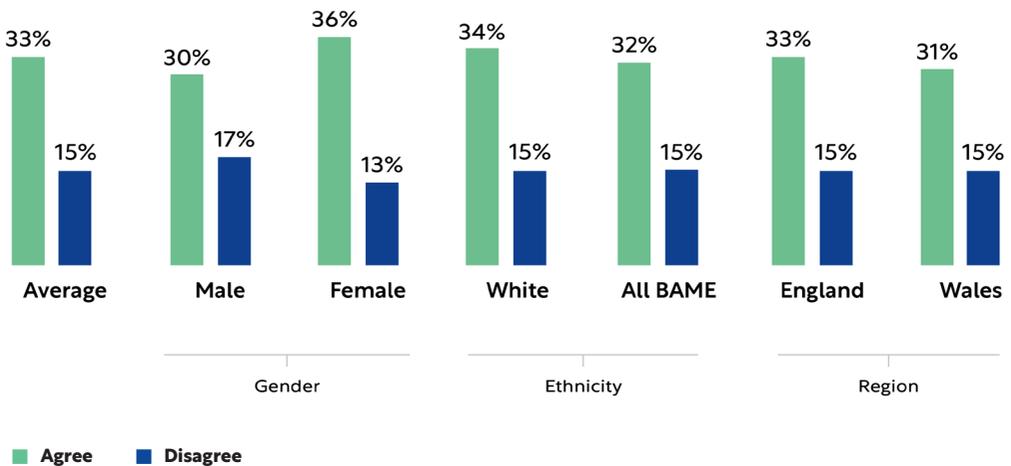


Chart 3.5: 'Overall, I found the passages chosen for Bible readings moving' (agree/disagree) by demographic group

**'Overall, I found the Bible readings boring'
(shown: agree and disagree)**

Base: all those who engaged in the funeral events, n=2246

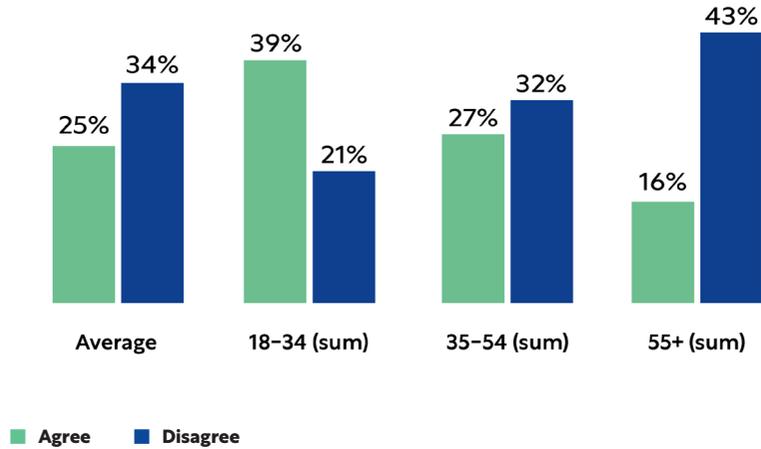


Chart 3.6: 'Overall, I found the Bible readings boring' (agree/disagree) by age

**'Overall, I found the Bible readings moving'
(shown: agree and disagree)**

Base: all those who engaged in the funeral events, n=2246

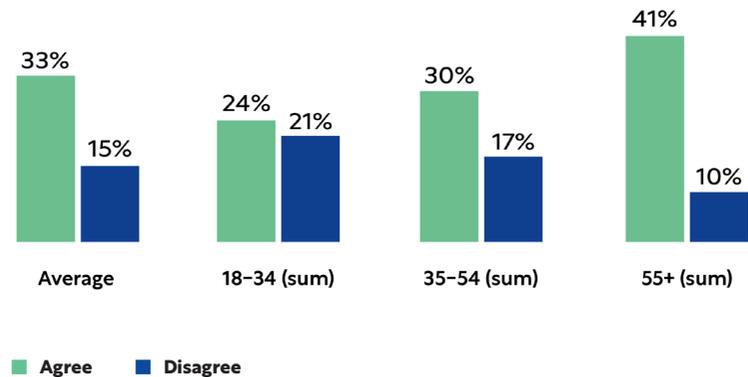


Chart 3.7: 'Overall, I found the passages chosen for Bible readings moving' (agree/disagree) by age

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Christians were far more likely to agree they found the Bible readings moving (51%) than boring (11%), a trend even more evident among churchgoers, where 74% agreed that they were moving compared to only 6% who agreed they were boring (see Charts 3.8 and 3.9).

Agreement that the Bible readings were boring was above average for both people of other faiths and people with no religion. Among people of other faiths just under a third (30%) said they found the Bible readings boring, while 22% disagreed with this statement. At 26%, just over a quarter of people with a non-Christian faith said they found the Bible readings moving.

Agreement that the Bible readings were boring was notably high among those with no religion at 40%, and even higher again among Dismissives at 58%. Conversely, just 15% of people with no religion said they found the Bible readings moving, dropping to 6% among those coolest to Christianity. It is interesting to note that unlike younger people and people with a non-Christian faith, non-religious people were only slightly likelier than average to agree that they found the Bible readings difficult to understand, suggesting their reception response was not a comprehension issue.

15%

of people with no religion said they found the Bible readings moving, dropping to 6% among those coolest to Christianity

'Overall, I found the Bible readings boring' (shown: agree and disagree)

Base: All those who engaged in the funeral events, n=2246

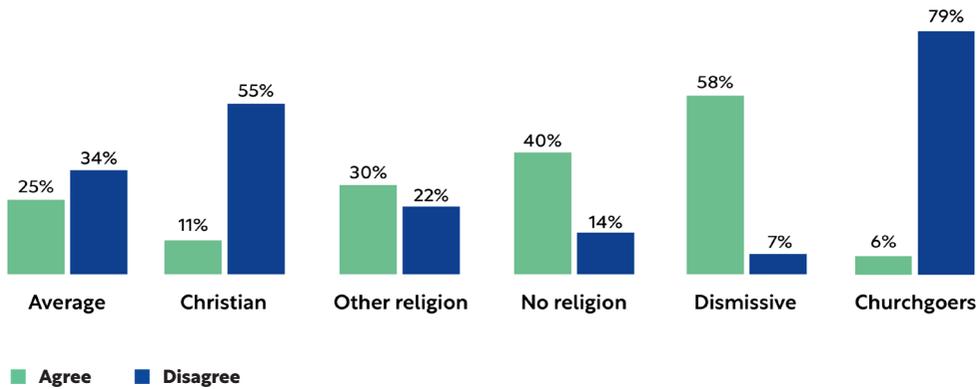


Chart 3.8: 'Overall, I found the Bible readings boring' (agree/disagree) by religion/worldview

'Overall, I found the passages chosen for Bible readings moving' (shown: agree and disagree)

Base: All those who engaged in the funeral events, n=2246

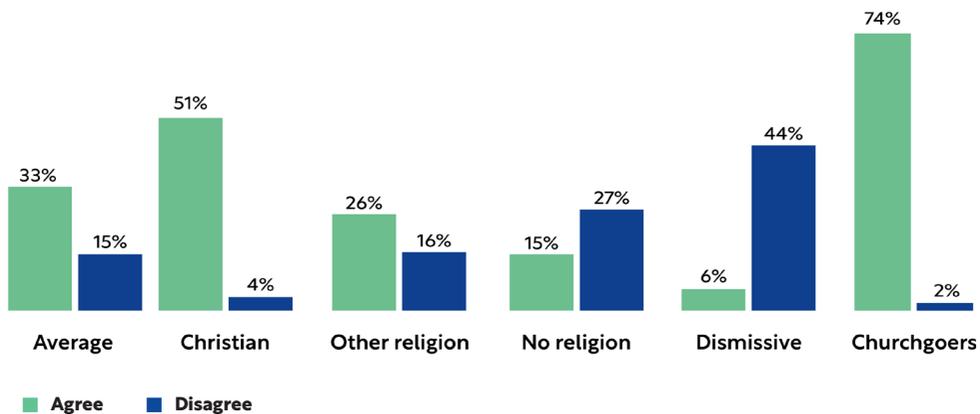


Chart 3.9: Agree/Disagree to 'Overall, I found the passages chosen for Bible readings moving' (agree/disagree) by religion/worldview

The Bible spoke, but did it seem relevant?

For a significant proportion of the population, the Bible passages were seen as emotionally relevant and appropriate to the occasion.

The issue of Bible relevancy is perhaps the most pressing missional challenge for Bible communicators in contemporary Britain. While in the past agencies such as Bible Society have had to focus their efforts on translation and distribution of Bibles to deliver unmet demand, today the situation is very different. In Britain and much of the West (as in the wider world), Bibles are easily available, whether from libraries or in the download of an app, but appetite for the Bible is low among the population at large.

Much of the wider Bible Society research programme suggests issues of Bible relevancy to be significant barriers to interest in Bible engagement. While many people in England and Wales demonstrate warmth to the Bible as a cultural artefact, far fewer believe the Bible has something relevant to say to them. In this survey we asked a number of questions we have asked in tracker surveys over the past five years. We do not have scope to explore the trends within this report but it provides useful context to share that within this survey, 21% of the full sample agreed with the statement ‘The Bible is relevant to me personally’, while 55% actively disagreed. In similar figures, 22% of the sample agreed with the statement ‘The Bible has the potential to help me answer some deep questions’, while 50% actively disagreed.² This is slightly warmer than in other surveys, but otherwise typical of how these statements tend to be answered.

With this background in mind, we asked the subsample who engaged in Funeral events whether they found the Bible readings to be relevant. We asked both about personal relevancy – in asking whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement ‘Overall, I felt the Bible readings were relevant to my feelings at the time’ – and event relevancy, through agreeing or disagreeing with the statement ‘Overall I felt the Bible readings were not relevant to the occasion.’

Higher than our generic relevancy statements, just under a third (31%) of the subsample agreed with the statement ‘Overall, I felt the Bible readings were relevant to my feelings at the time.’³ 18% disagreed, and again, we see similarly high neither agree nor disagree responses at 41% of the subsample.

² While no doubt sombre reading for many in the Church, this still represents a fifth of the population, while both regular Bible reading and churchgoing fall well under this, suggesting a warmth to the Bible that can be cultivated further.

³ It is important to remember here that these questions were asked of the subsample, not the full sample. The generic relevant questions were asked to all. Comparisons must be carefully made and treated with caution.

31%

agreed ‘Overall, I felt the Bible readings were relevant to my feelings at the time’

We see a clear and significant generational divide on the place of the Bible in this event

There was little deviation from the national average between men and women nor notably strong regional deviation. Agreement was broadly in line with the national average for people from Black, Asian and other minority ethnic groups as a whole (29%), although disagreement was above average at 23%. Again, it should be noted there is not homogeneity within this grouping – people from Black ethnic groups showed considerably high levels of agreement, well above the national average, but the small sample means we cannot report on this reliably, and instead encourage further research.

Agreement that the Bible readings were relevant to their feelings at the time was highest among those close to the Bible – both Christians in general and in particular churchgoers (see Chart 3.10). While agreement was below the sample average for people of non-Christian faiths, one in five people from this group said they did find the Bible readings personally relevant. This is notable for being broadly in line with the number of those who found the Bible moving.

The greatest level of disagreement was seen in people of no religion – 30% of them disagreed that the Bible readings felt relevant to their feelings, and just 11% agreed. To some extent, this reflects the proportion of people with no religion who said they found the Bible readings moving.

Just 9% of the subsample agreed with the statement ‘Overall, I felt the Bible readings were not relevant to the occasion’. The majority – 51% - disagreed, while a further 30% said they neither agreed nor disagreed. Disagreement cannot be considered hidden agreement, but nonetheless, these responses hint at the idea of the appropriateness of the Bible at a national event – something we explore in more detail in the following chapter.

Unlike many statements in this survey, this question showed a fairly strong split on sex – 55% of women disagreed that the Bible readings were not relevant to the occasion, compared to 45% of men. Agreement was above average (14%) from people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnicities as a whole and disagreement was lower than average at 43%.

People with no religion were only slightly more likely than average to agree that the Bible readings were not relevant to the occasion at 11%. For people of other faiths, this rose to 16%. Both groups, however, were less likely than average to disagree with the statement, instead saying they neither agreed nor disagreed. Again notable are the Dismissive group, where 19% agreed with the statement, although more – 31% - disagreed, suggesting even here there is at least some expectation of the place of the Bible in public life.

On age, the most notable finding is that 17% of 18–34-year-olds agreed that the Bible readings were not relevant, compared to just 6% of over 55s. Again, we see a clear and significant generational divide on the place of the Bible in this event, and as we will see in the following chapter, the public square at large.

'Overall, I felt the Bible readings were relevant to my feelings at the time'
(shown: agree and disagree)

Base: All those who engaged in the funeral events, n=2246

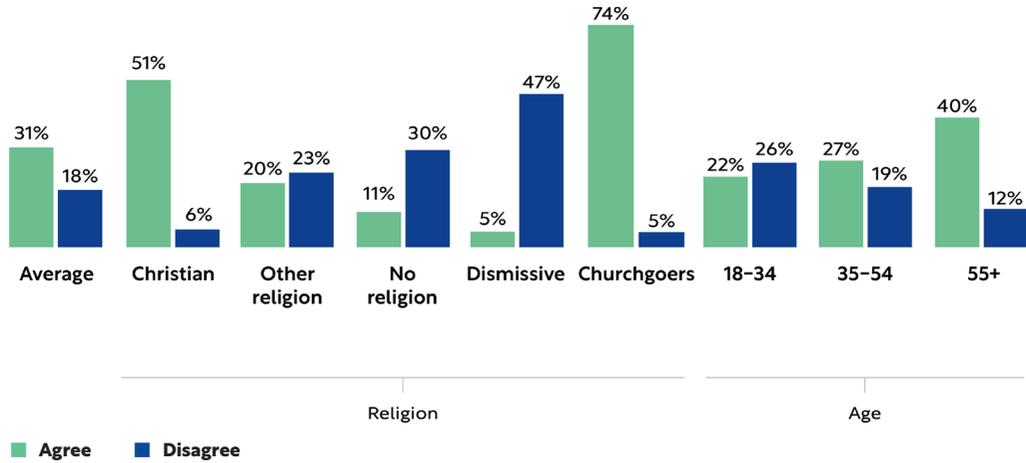


Chart 3.10: 'Overall, I found the Bible readings were relevant to my feelings at the time' (agree/disagree) by demographic group

'Overall, I felt the Bible readings were not relevant to the occasion'
(shown: agree and disagree)

Base: All those who engaged in the funeral events, n=2246

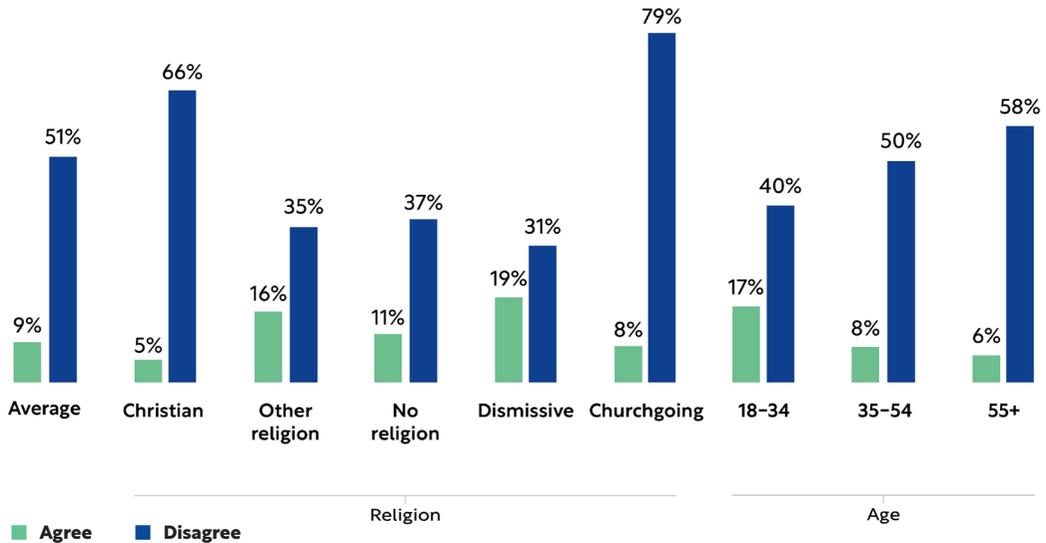


Chart 3.11: 'Overall, I found the Bible readings were not relevant to the occasion' (agree/disagree) by demographic group

Concluding reflections

Within this chapter we've seen that for many in our society the Bible can speak with personal relevance and emotional affect. This is not limited to churchgoers, or even Christians as a whole. On both reception and relevancy statements, there appears to be personal positive warmth from approximately a third of the subsample to the Bible readings presented in the Funeral events. This equates to about 23% of the sample as a whole, again demonstrating that there is warmth to the Bible beyond the Church. Bible communicators and mission practitioners can perhaps be encouraged to build upon this to reach those otherwise at a distance from the Bible. Emotional connection is likely to be key to deepening perceptions of personal relevancy.

Nonetheless, the data presented in this chapter holds some challenges for Bible communicators, particularly as Britain prepares for the coronation of King Charles, when we can again expect to hear the Bible spoken publicly. It is undeniable that a significant proportion of those who watched the Funeral, regional memorial events and/or Committal found the Bible boring, difficult to engage with and understand, or lacking in emotional relevance. This was particularly the case for people with no religion, people of non-Christian faiths, and young people as a whole, and is likely to have confirmed their existing perceptions of the Bible. For those who seek to make the Bible accessible to all, whether from a position of faith or because of its position with British culture and heritage, considering how best to support people from these groups must be prioritised.

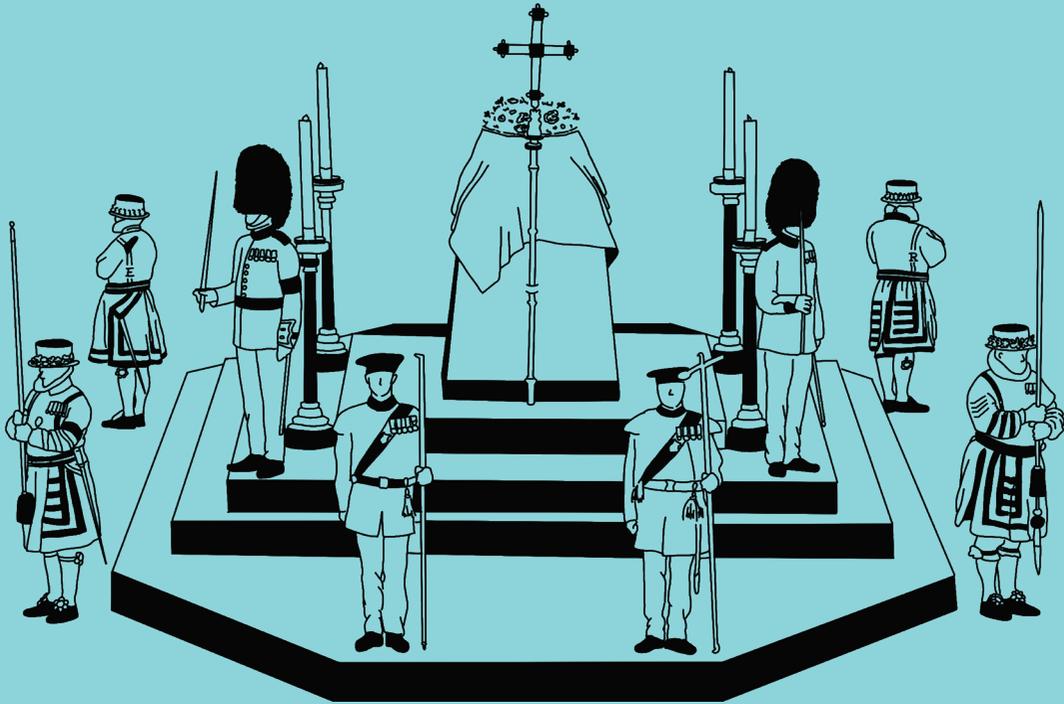
On both reception and relevancy statements, there appears to be personal positive warmth from approximately a third of the subsample to the Bible readings presented in the Funeral events

4

Christianity and the Bible in royal ritual

'At times such as these, the established church does for us what we cannot do ourselves. This is true after any bereavement; in the case of [Princess] Diana the role was simply magnified to meet the demands of a nation as well as a family.'

GRACE DAVIE AND DAVID MARTIN¹



In summary:

- Overwhelmingly, those who engaged with the funeral events viewed the prominence of Christianity in the State Funeral as appropriate for both the Queen as an individual and British royal events as a whole
- The majority of respondents - 55% - were happy that the events were wholly Christian, with only 12% saying they found this prominence alienating and fewer than one in ten saying they should have instead been wholly secular. Even among the non-religious, 36% said they were happy the events were wholly Christian, with only 12% saying they should have been wholly secular
- Overall, people are more likely to agree than disagree with keeping state royal events wholly Christian in the future.
- There is little appetite across the board for the introduction of non-Christian elements, or making the events wholly secular
- Respondents were two-and-a-half times more likely to agree than disagree that the Bible should be heard at these events

¹ 'Liturgy and Music', in *The Mourning for Diana*, ed. by Tony Walter (Oxford: Berg, 1999), pp. 187–98 (p. 194).

Christianity and ritual in the mourning period

Christianity, the Bible, and the Church were at the heart of these powerful ritual moments.

As we saw in the previous chapter, the Bible was an ever-present feature within the ceremonial events of the mourning period. Beyond the Bible, other Christian hymns, prayers, and sermons were regular features of the ceremonies, alongside traditional Christian aesthetics (such as liturgical dress and church architecture) which consistently re-emphasised the role of Christianity and the Church in defining this period in the public eye. Holding each of these elements together – whether ancient or novel – was the liturgical structure of the Church of England through which all the major rituals were constructed. Even the ritual of Lying-in-State – perhaps the most unusual ceremonial element that could be considered a direct act of mourning – was preceded by a short service featuring psalms, prayers, and readings led by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Likewise, the Accession Council, which cannot be fairly considered a mourning ceremony but was nevertheless a hugely symbolically significant event in the week, placed great emphasis on the relationship between the King and the Church of Scotland, again emphasising the prominence of Christianity in these proceedings.

The climax of these ceremonial events was the State Funeral. Beneath the opulence and grandeur of the occasion, this was, fundamentally, a deeply conventional Anglican liturgical service. It followed the structure and order of the Book of Common Prayer, with a funeral service that has been largely unchanged since 1662.² Stretching back further still, all British royal and state funerals since 1603 have followed the liturgy of the Church of England, or Presbyterian Church of Scotland where appropriate.³ These are not liturgies reserved purely for Kings and Queens, but rather are the same words, Bible readings, and structures that have been used by millions of Anglicans around the world for centuries. One of the more unusual features of the Queen's funeral relative to those of previous monarchs – the sermon,⁴ delivered by the Archbishop of Canterbury – was deeply and unapologetically Christian (and even evangelical) in tone, with the Archbishop taking the opportunity to emphasise the Christian teaching of life after death, as well as the Queen's own faith and practice. The Queen's more personal interventions (such as the hymns selected) were likewise deeply Christian in tone.

Beneath the opulence and grandeur of the occasion, this was, fundamentally, a deeply conventional Anglican liturgical service

In this context, then, Christianity, the Bible, and the institutional Church are located firmly at the centre of this moment of British civic life and, crucially, of British civic ritual. A series of services witnessed by tens of millions in the UK alone, these aspects were prominent and unavoidable. In response, this chapter explores how these elements were received by viewers before digging deeper into the nature and purpose of mourning rituals in general and why religion was particularly powerfully suited for Queen Elizabeth's mourning period. We conclude by diving back into the data to see perceptions of the role of Christianity, the Bible, and the Church in the future of royal ritual.

² Range, p.23.

³ Range, p.17.

⁴ As mentioned earlier in the report, the inclusion of a sermon in a monarch's funeral was a new feature.

'The presence of Christian language and imagery was appropriate...'
(Shown: Agree)

Base: All those who engaged in the funeral events, n=2246

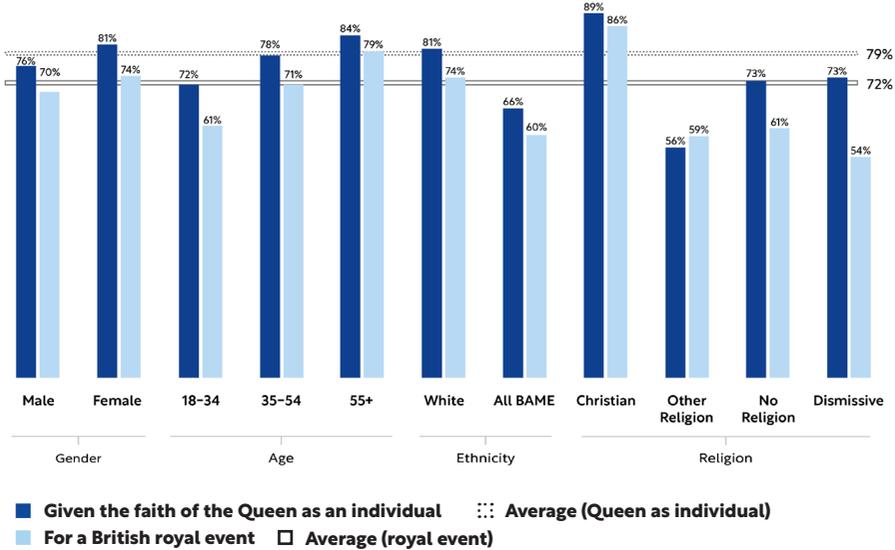
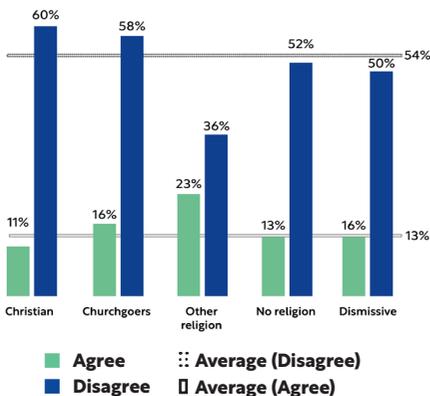


Chart 4.1: Comparison between 'The presence of Christian language and imagery was appropriate given the faith of the Queen as an individual' and 'The presence of Christian language and imagery was appropriate for a British royal event' (agree/disagree) by demographic group

'The events should have incorporated elements from other faith traditions alongside Christian elements' (Shown: Agree and Disagree)

Base: All those who engaged in the funeral events, n=2246



'The events should have been wholly secular (i.e. non religious)' (Shown: Agree And Disagree)

Base: All those who engaged in the funeral events, n=2246

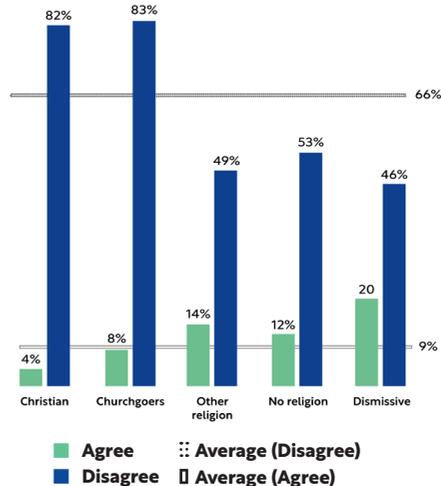


Chart 4.2/4.3: Attitudes to introducing non-Christian elements into the mourning events (agree/disagree) by religion/worldview

How was this received?

Religious language and imagery in the State Funeral

 verwhelmingly the Christian language and imagery was viewed as appropriate not only for the Queen as an individual, but for royal events more generally

Firstly, we wanted to find out from those that had engaged in the mourning events how appropriate they believed this prominence of Christianity was not only in the context of the funeral of a devoted Christian (in the case of the Queen) but for British royal events more broadly. We were conscious that it is one thing to follow the wishes of the deceased individual, but potentially another entirely to say this is appropriate for royal events as a whole.

While agreement with the appropriateness of the language given the Queen's personal faith was stronger on average, what we found was that, overwhelmingly, people viewed this as appropriate in both scenarios. In both cases, agreement was over 70% (Chart 4.1).

Trends common throughout the report relating to gender, age, and ethnicity remain present, while (as might be expected) Christians are considerably more enthusiastic in their agreement than those who are non-religious or from other religions. One oddity is that those from other religions are the only group more likely to agree that it is generally appropriate for British royal events than for the Queen as an individual, but given the (relatively) small base sizes this may not be of meaningful significance. It is notable that even among the Dismissive group over half say that the presence of Christian language and imagery was appropriate for a British royal event.

Looking beyond Christianity, we also asked whether elements from other religious traditions should have been incorporated into the events (Chart 4.2), as well as whether they should have been wholly secular (Chart 4.3). Focusing solely on the religious breakdowns for these questions shows that there is very limited interest in these elements, even among groups to whom these directly relate.

Notably, these charts show that, in every category, more respondents disagreed than agreed with the statements offered. Interestingly, among Christians there appears to be a split between the Churchgoing group and the set as a whole. While both are considerably more likely to disagree than agree, beyond this churchgoers are more notably more likely to agree with the introduction of non-Christian elements in particular (16%) as well as moving towards a secular ceremony (though this remains unpopular here,

Overwhelmingly the Christian language and imagery was viewed as appropriate not only for the Queen as an individual, but for royal events more generally

We see broad positivity to the events being Christian

as with the ‘no religion’ group). The former trend in particular may stem from a similar perspective to that of the late Queen herself, who was firm in her own faith but simultaneously saw great value in the presence of other religious traditions in British public life, notably reflected in the involvement of prominent individuals from other religions in her funeral.

As would be expected, those from other religions are most supportive of the idea of incorporating elements from outside of Christianity, but even here there is net disagreement. Two elements stand out as potentially surprising when looking at the Dismissive category. Firstly, while they are the most open to a wholly secular ceremony, as with the non-Christian group they nevertheless remain broadly against the idea. Secondly, while they are collectively slightly more open to incorporations of other faith traditions into the events than the non-religious group, they are broadly in line with regular churchgoers on this front – who are themselves considerably less likely to agree than the Christian group. Finally, in all bar the Dismissive group, people are more open to the incorporation of other faith elements than they are to a wholly secular event. This again reinforces the significance of religion in these events.

To clarify this, we also asked participants whether they were ‘happy the events were wholly Christian’ (Chart 4.4).

Again here we see broad positivity towards the events being Christian, with only the Dismissive group being more likely to disagree than agree – and even here this is very marginal, with 25% agreeing and 26% disagreeing with the statement. Of Dismissives, 46% chose ‘Neither agree nor disagree’ for this question.

The nature of the liturgy – as noted, largely unchanged in 360 years – and the Bible readings – taken from the King James Version, over 400 years old – led us to ask whether participants felt the Christian language and imagery used was out of place in a society which is now majority non-Christian, with non-religious identity rising rapidly and the place of religion in culture being questioned and steadily diminished. Again, the answer was a clear no. On average, 58% of people disagreed with the statement, with only 14% agreeing. Even among 18-34s, more disagreed (42%) than agreed (24%). Returning to the idea of ‘Tradition’ as visited in Chapter 2, then, we see that traditional does not necessarily mean it is out of place in modern Britain.

'I am happy the events were wholly Christian' (Shown: Agree and Disagree)

Base: All those who engaged in the funeral events. n=2246

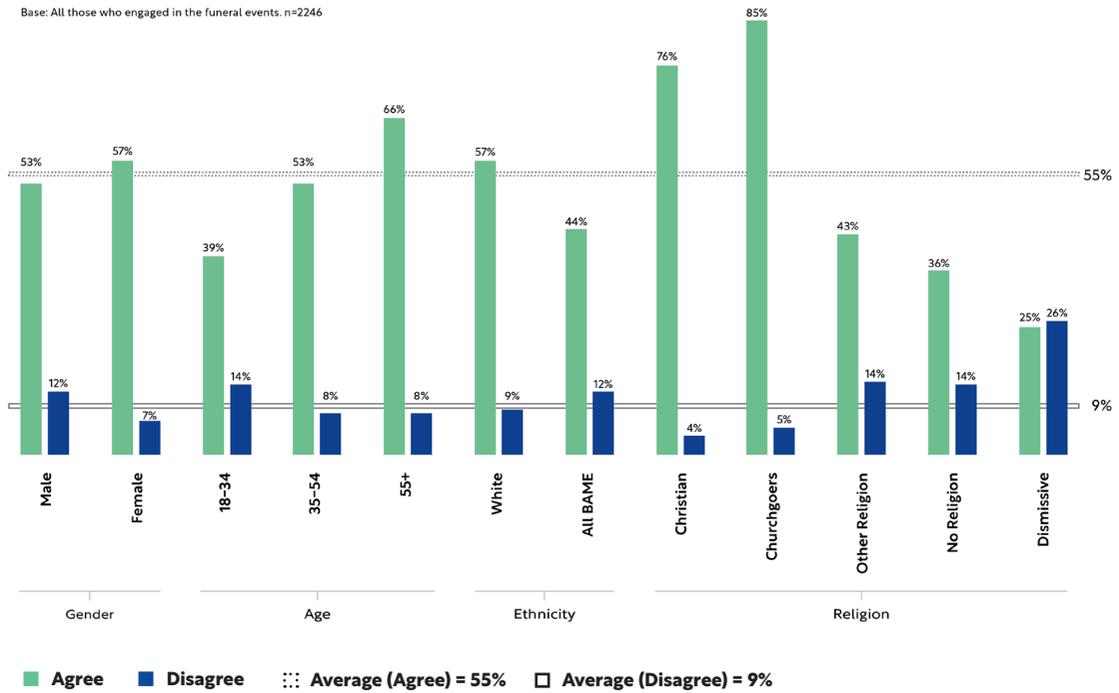


Chart 4.4: 'I am happy the events were wholly Christian' (agree/disagree) by demographic group.

This does stand as an interesting contrast to more general questions, asked to the entire sample (not only those who engaged with the mourning events). When posed with the statement ‘The Church doesn’t understand modern Britain’, 46% of the population agreed, including over half (53%) of 18-34-year-olds. Explored together, these findings suggest that while there is a continued openness to the role of even very traditional forms of Christian expression at the highest points of British ritual life in twenty-first-century Britain, there remains a dissonance between this level and their wider experience of the Church in contemporary society.

We see consistent support for the role of Christian language, imagery and practice in the events following the Queen’s death

Personal experience of religion in the mourning events

These Christian elements were not viewed as alienating – but nor were they seen as necessarily spiritually moving.

Believing something to be appropriate for an event does not necessarily mean it is personally engaging, and we wanted to look at how people had experienced these elements. Firstly, we asked whether the prevalence of Christian language and imagery through the service had alienated them from the occasion. Only 12% of respondents who had engaged in the mourning events agreed that they had been alienated by the Christian elements, with nearly two-thirds (65%) disagreeing with the statement. Even among followers of other religions this was relatively low at 21% agreement (compared to 45% of those who disagreed), with 16% of non-religious people agreeing and 53% disagreeing. This is not to say that all these respondents felt actively included in the Christian features, and over one in five saying they felt alienated is still a concern, but it does suggest that most non-Christians did not feel excluded from the proceedings because of the prominence of Christian language and practice.

Having outlined these perceptions of the events as religious occasions, we finally wanted to ask whether or not the viewers experienced it as a spiritual event themselves. While 28% of respondents agreed that it was – including over a fifth of 18-34s and 62% CGC of regular churchgoers – on average a higher proportion (37%) disagreed with the statement. As would be expected, religious identity is a key indicator here. However, it is interesting to note that even among the non-religious over one in ten said that it was a spiritual experience for them. This suggests two interesting elements. Firstly, that identifying yourself as non-religious does not mean you cannot find religious ceremony spiritually powerful. Secondly, beyond this it points towards the enduring power of religious rituals to evoke emotions, even among those who are unfamiliar with them.

In this data we see consistent support for the role of Christian language, imagery and practice in the events following the Queen's death, as well as more broadly in similar royal events. Christian ritual is clearly seen as most suitable and fitting for these occasions, not only by Christians themselves but by non-Christians, non-religious people, and even by those who are otherwise coldest towards religion and the Bible. In order to understand why this may be the case, it's worth exploring the role of ritual in supporting communities and individuals, and the enduring power of Christianity to speak to our society in these periods of collective need.

Religion and mourning rituals

The purpose of ritual

'Death typically shatters the social fabric, which has to be repaired – through ritual, through conversation, through negotiating new roles. Death therefore provides a natural experiment in how a society constructs order in the face of disorder'⁵

While rituals come in many forms, from the magnificent to the mundane, in times of mourning they serve particular roles, both on a social and individual level. In death we are faced with the transformation of the deceased from living to dead and simultaneously with the rupturing of a social world, whether that is on a familial level or a much larger societal-structural level, where a physical and social presence becomes an absence. It is the purpose of mourning rituals to guide individuals and communities through these periods, to provide structure in times of uncertainty, to help repair the ruptures, to help the living adjust to the new social world without the departed, and to guide the deceased through to their new existence. Following a period of transition and reflection, these rituals often come to a climax with the funeral event, in which grief is given a focus, the living are reminded of the eternal fate of their loved one, and the deceased are ritually assisted through to their next phase, before the physical body is finally laid to rest.

Within Christianity, the language and teachings of Scripture have been central to the development of mourning rituals for 2,000 years. Cultural contexts and ecclesiastical traditions offer distinctive elements across the world, but the ancient words of Scripture continue to endure at the core, supporting people with hope and stability in the midst of grief and chaos, healing in the face of rupture.

'Language provides a key vehicle for navigating the tumultuous process of bereavement and loss, helping us not only come to terms with a sense of what, exactly, has been lost and is being mourned, but serving also to displace the acute sense of loss by transforming an event experienced as meaningless into something meaningful.'⁶

⁵ Tony Walter, 'Preface', in *The Mourning for Diana*, ed. by Tony Walter (Oxford: Berg, 1999), pp. xiii–xiv, (p. xiii).

⁶ Michael Brennan, *Mourning and Disaster: Finding Meaning in the Mourning for Hillsborough and Diana* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), p. 3.

The ancient words of Scripture continue to endure at the core, supporting people with hope and stability in the midst of grief and chaos, healing in the face of rupture

Rupture and ritual in the death of Queen Elizabeth II

The funeral rituals around Queen Elizabeth allowed the public to mourn an individual, a monarch, and their own departed loved ones.

Mourning the Woman

In the case of someone as widely appreciated as the Queen, the social disruption caused in death is considerable. As an individual, she was admired and beloved by millions around the world, and in Britain seen by many as a motherly, grandmotherly, and great-grandmotherly figure who had been a constant for generations. She touched people through her carefully considered media appearances (notably the Christmas speech) and more directly through her thousands of engagements with the public annually. She was a patron of over 600 charities through her reign – including Bible Society. Through all of this, her direct personal impact was perhaps impossible to measure. Of course, alongside this she had her own family and close friends, each of which were mourning the death of a close loved one as any of us would.

To adjust to this loss, events and reflections took place through the week in which the Queen was made spiritually and physically present – in memorials, broadcast coverage, and in the form of her coffin, which lay at the centre of services, processions, and most prominently the Lying-in-State – before the ritual processes of the funeral. In the funeral, committal and burial services her loved ones, along with her former subjects and the whole world, could bid their final farewells and lay her to rest.

Mourning the Monarch

And yet this was not purely the death of a notable public individual. Funerals of this form, such as those of Princess Diana, Michael Jackson, or Margaret Thatcher, are not unusual in the media age. While these caused personal ruptures of different forms, even among many who had never met the individual, the potential social rupture caused by the death of a reigning monarch is incomparable. The purpose of the rituals here, therefore, is also to guide the nation (and other affected territories) through the hugely symbolic period of transition between heads of state while maintaining the integrity of the institution through what has historically often been a volatile period, and even in the case of the Queen raised questions around the future. At the heart of this is the symbol of the monarchy itself, highlighted simultaneously in the dead (for example in the items placed on top of the Queen's coffin during the events – the orb and sceptre and the imperial state crown, with the coffin itself shrouded in the Royal Standard flag) and the living, with Charles immediately becoming King at the moment of the Queen's passing,

Through this collective ritual experience, drawing on familiar language and practices, viewers could both mourn the loss of an admired individual and their own loved ones

symbolised by the fact that the Royal Standard is never flown at half-mast as the monarchy lives on. ‘The Queen is dead. Long live the King!’

Again, Christianity and the church are at the heart of ritually guiding the nation through this period of potential disruption, both in the mourning rituals and in the coronation service. In the case of the coronation, the liturgy is heavily influenced by the idea of monarchy within the Bible, including the Archbishop of Canterbury anointing the new monarch with oil. The Church of England, Scripture, and longstanding Christian practices lie at the heart of these processes, that not only guide individuals through periods of emotional pain but the nation through seismic transitions of power. No longer hidden away, these Christian ceremonies have become massive public events broadcast through every medium, and their power reaches far beyond the walls of the Abbey and into living rooms across the world, resonating in perhaps unexpected forms with members of the public.

Mourning the unmourned

While these events are unimaginably grander than the mourning rituals of the general public, many nevertheless have shared foundations. This is particularly true of the funeral service, which as previously noted was structured on the Anglican funeral rite, but even the Lying-in-State can be seen as an elaborated version of a wake, in which a continuous watch is held over the body of the deceased prior to the funeral and loved ones can spend time in the physical presence of the dead.

Yet these were not simply elaborated versions of familiar ceremonies. In the context of a nation and a world still recovering from the worst of a pandemic that not only caused over 200,000 deaths in the UK alone, but also restricted the ability of families to mourn in the ways they would have wanted, the Queen’s funeral offered a vision of how things should be done. Reflecting on the liturgy and music at the funeral of Princess Diana, Grace Davie and David Martin noted:

‘This service served to make up what was lacking in thousands of unsatisfactory memorial or funeral services (or both combined in a hurried twenty minutes in the crematorium chapel). Piped music accompanying undischarged griefs over untimely departures was transmuted into true musical splendour to honour the dead, and into full and sufficient absolutions.’⁷

⁷ Davie and Martin, p. 194.

How much more was this the case following the struggles of Covid-19, when even a 'hurried twenty minutes in the crematorium chapel' was unobtainable to many? Through this collective ritual experience, drawing on familiar language and practices, viewers could both mourn the loss of an admired individual and their own loved ones, whom they were unable to honour in the manner they deserved.



Figure 4.1 - Cartoon from The Times, 19 September 2022 Credit: Morten Morland / The Times / News Licensing.

The future of Christianity and the Bible in royal ritual

Despite the decline of individual Christian identity, there remains a desire to see Christianity at the heart of royal and state events.

The death of any monarch marks the end of a historical era, but the length of the Second Elizabethan Age meant the end felt like a potentially significant turning point in British history. Amongst countless social shifts over the course of her reign, the decline in widespread Christian identity and practice and concurrent rise in other religions and, in particular, non-religion has been one of the most societally significant. For this reason, while the results discussed earlier in this chapter on attitudes to the role of Christianity in royal ritual may apply to the epoch that has now come to a close, it may be the case that views are different when looking ahead to the era just beginning.

To explore this, we firstly asked all respondents what role respondents believe religion should play in a state royal event, such as a wedding or funeral. Consistently across three questions, around half of respondents said they either didn't know or neither agreed nor disagreed, perhaps indicating a broad apathy towards the topic. However, beyond this, as with the earlier findings people were consistently more likely to agree with the idea of retaining Christian elements and disagree with the rituals introducing non-Christian aspects or becoming wholly secular.⁸

Looking at the results in Chart 4.5, we see that close to one-third of all respondents agree that state royal events should be wholly Christian, with slightly over one-fifth disagreeing. While as would be expected, Christians and in particular regular churchgoers are significantly more likely than any other religious group to favour retention of the Christian status quo, active Christians alone cannot explain this phenomenon, as far fewer than one-third of the population attend church regularly. Indeed, this can be seen from the fact that there is also minority support for this among non-Christians and non-religious respondents. With both groups the majority are neutral or unsure on the topic. However, among those who do have a firm view the

Close to one-third of all respondents agree that state royal events should be wholly Christian

⁸ Unlike previous questions, these were asked to the entire sample – including those who had not engaged in any of the funeral events. This may

explain some of the differences between the two sets of responses, as it is understandable that those who more apathetic to these issues are less likely to have engaged with the funeral events.

'A state royal event, such as a wedding or a funeral, should be wholly Christian'

Base: All Adults in England & Wales, n=3035

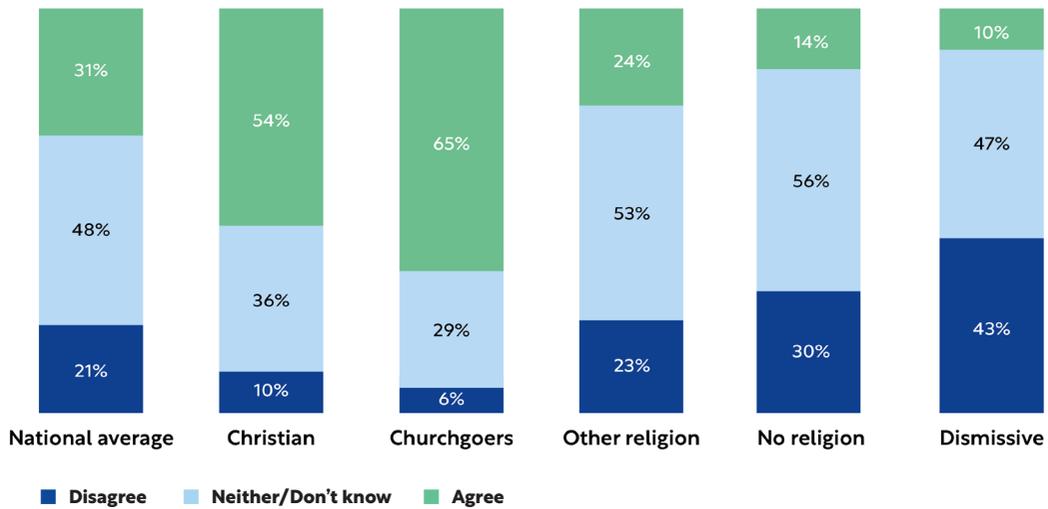


Chart 4.5: 'A state royal event, such as a wedding or funeral, should be wholly Christian' (all responses) by religion/worldview.

'A state royal event, such as a wedding or a funeral, should feature elements of other faiths, not just Christianity'

Base: All Adults in England & Wales, n=3035

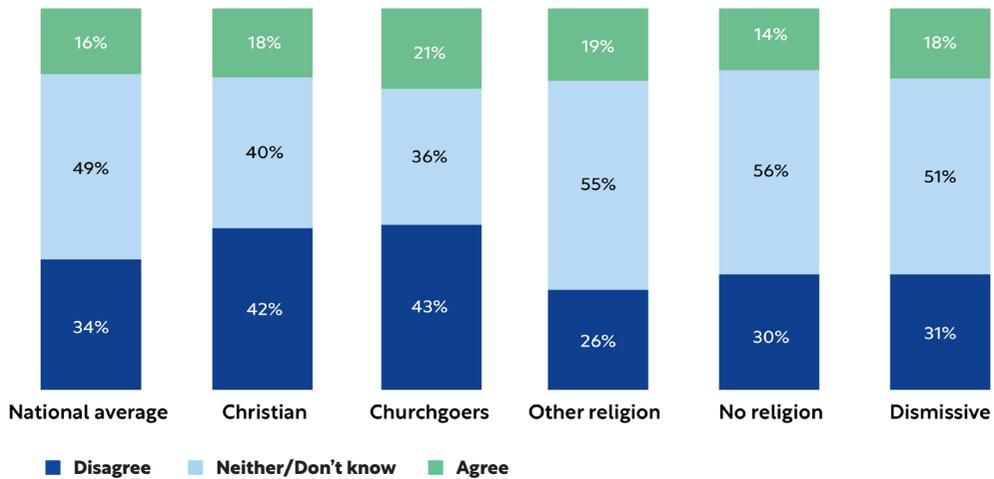


Chart 4.6: 'A state royal event, such as a wedding or a funeral, should feature elements of other faiths, not just Christianity' (all responses) by religion/worldview.

'A state royal event, such as a wedding or a funeral, should be wholly secular'

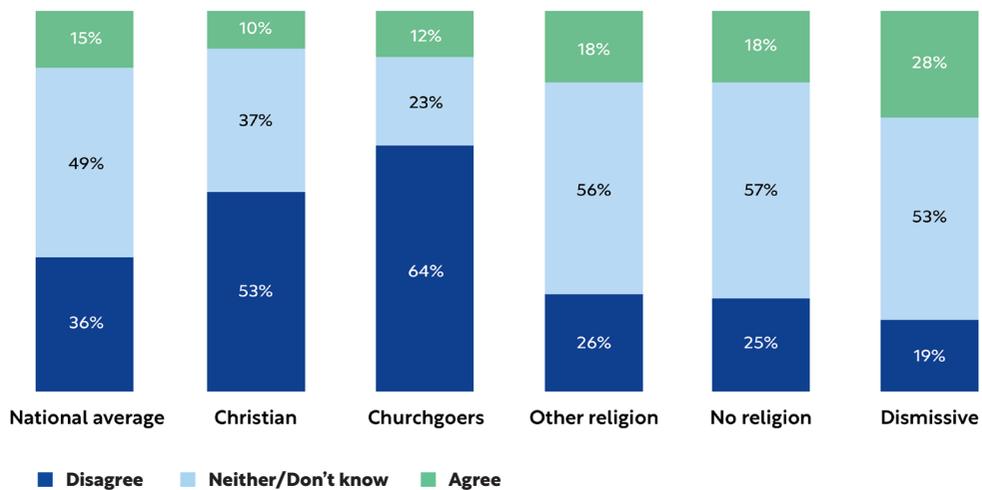


Chart 4.7: 'A state royal event, such as a wedding or a funeral, should be wholly secular' (all responses) by religion/worldview.

results are interesting. For those from other religions the views are split almost exactly equally. The non-religious, meanwhile, are more than twice as likely to disagree that state royal events should be wholly Christian than agree with this. When we focus only on Dismissives this rises to the point where over four times as many disagree than agree.

More than twice as many respondents disagreed with the idea of incorporating elements from other religions than agreed (Chart 4.6). As with the similar question asked to those who had engaged in the mourning events, churchgoers are more likely to agree with this than Christians in general. In fact, churchgoers emerge as slightly higher in their agreement than any other group. However, they also are, alongside Christians, significantly more likely to disagree with this statement than any of the other groups. Among the non-religious, the responses are similar to the previous question, with 14% agreeing and 30% disagreeing, while those in the Dismissive group are actually more likely than the non-religious as a whole to agree with this topic – in contrast to the previous question. While they remain a minority in both cases, the previous two questions show again that being non-religious does not mean that people necessarily want religion removed from public life.

The third possibility offered, that the events should be wholly secular, received similar overall results to the previous option. However, looking across the religious breakdowns there are differences (Chart 4.7). Christians and (particularly) churchgoers are significantly more likely to disagree with this than the previous statement, while Dismissives are the only group more likely to agree here than disagree. Even here, however, over half of the group either didn't know or said they neither agreed nor disagreed. Throughout the three statements, churchgoers were the least likely to select one of these more ambivalent options, suggesting they may be more passionate in their views on the role of religion in state royal events. Regardless, the findings here suggest that there is very little desire to introduce non-Christian elements to these ceremonies, or alternatively make them entirely secular, even among non-Christians and non-religious people.

Finally, we asked whether these events should feature the Bible (Chart 4.8). Again, approximately half responded with either Don't Know or Neither Agree nor Disagree, but 37% agreed that they should, close to twice as many as disagreed.

Among Christians and specifically churchgoers the response is overwhelmingly in agreement with the statement, with only 3% of each disagreeing. Those

More than twice as many respondents disagreed with the idea of incorporating elements from other religions than agreed

from other religions are also more likely to agree than disagree, though this tips slightly to the other direction in the case of non-religious respondents, while Dismissives are considerably more likely to disagree (with the majority still selecting Neither or Don't Know). Again, we see the broad support for the retention of Christianity at the heart of royal ritual – with an expectation that the Bible will be an active presence in these events.

As with other questions explored in this research, age appears to be a significant indicator of response in these areas, and the trend is clear – particularly among the youngest age group. For example, when we look at whether the events should be wholly Christian, those aged 18–34 are actually more likely to disagree than agree by a margin of 5 percentage points, in stark difference to the population as a whole. 18–34-year-olds are also more likely to agree that these events should be wholly secular (18%) and significantly less likely to disagree (27%) than the population as a whole, while only a quarter agree that the Bible should be present, compared to 37% of the wider population. Nevertheless, even here younger people are more likely to agree than disagree

**18–34-year-olds
are also more
likely to agree
that these events
should be wholly
secular**

'A state royal event, such as a wedding or a funeral, should feature the Bible'

Base: All Adults in England & Wales, n=3035

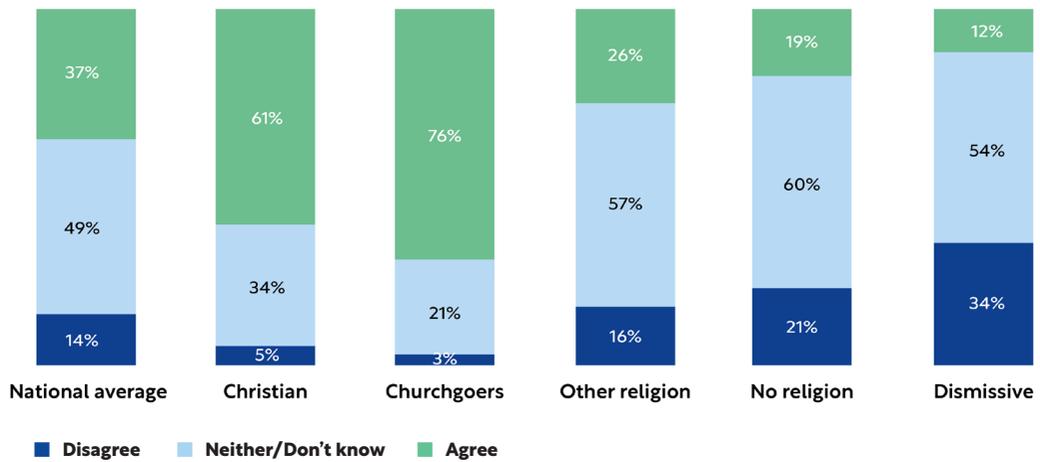


Chart 4.8: 'A state royal event, such as a wedding or funeral, should feature the Bible' (all responses) by religion/worldview.

For the first time since it was recorded on the Census, England and Wales were no longer majority Christian countries

Concluding reflections

Along with the Bible references mentioned in the previous chapter, wider Christian language, practice, and aesthetics were deeply and consistently embedded in the mourning events that followed the death of the Queen. These historic rituals were central to guiding individuals and wider society through this period of intense potential disruption as her loved ones and the nation mourned both the passing of an admired individual and a head of state. In the midst of this, individuals were also able to reflect on their own loved ones who had passed, many without the funeral events they envisioned due to the restrictions during the Covid-19 pandemic, let alone the majesty of a state funeral.

In this we saw the consistent value of Christian and religious ritual in these times of uncertainty and grief. Even beyond those ceremonies specifically co-ordinated by the Church, the power of Christian ritual was seen in more spontaneous events that nevertheless mirrored ancient practices – shrines created in honour of the deceased; a mass pilgrimage to a sacred site to see the relics and pay respect; even the bodily actions of those reaching the coffin, crossing themselves, praying, or genuflecting⁹. Religious ritual, even when drawn on by members of the public from a pool of long-standing cultural resources, has proven to be incredibly resilient and powerful in this period. But, as Davie and Martin noted following even more heightened public response after the death of Princess Diana, it is in moments such as this where the Church remains unmatched in modern society. Writing about Diana’s memorial service the day after her death, they note that the elements

‘were chosen to affirm Christian certainties in face of human vulnerability. They were spoken before a congregation visibly in shock and barely able to comprehend either what had happened or the words that they were hearing. Precisely this, however, gives meaning to the Church’s role. At times such as these, the established church does for us what we cannot do ourselves. This is true after any bereavement; in the case of Diana the role was simply magnified to meet the demands of a nation as well as a family.’¹⁰

This is clearly reflected in our data. The findings show that in these key moments of royal and state ceremony and ritual, there is still a desire for Christianity and the Bible to remain at the centre. Even among those from other religions and from no religion, there is very limited appetite for a shift

towards a secular or non-Christian event. Looking to the future, and beyond solely those who engaged with the Queen's funeral, this feeling remains. As a result, it seems clear that in these moments of national and global significance, Christianity, the Church, and the Bible still have an essential role to play at the heart of British public life.

Around two months after the funeral events it was confirmed that, for the first time since it was recorded on the Census, England and Wales were no longer majority Christian countries. Despite Christianity remaining by some margin the most common religious (or non-religious) identity, this revelation stirred much debate around the continuing presence of Christianity and the Church in modern British society. While this discussion will continue across many areas, these findings add an important layer to the conversation. The Church, guided by Scripture and the traditions of Christian liturgy, remains trusted to oversee these national events.

⁹ Jennifer Chandler draws out these parallels between ancient religious practice and the apparently spontaneous responses of the crowd following the death of Princess Diana ('Pilgrims and

Shrines', in *The Mourning for Diana*, ed. by Tony Walter (Oxford: Berg, 1999), pp. 135–56 (pp. 151–154).

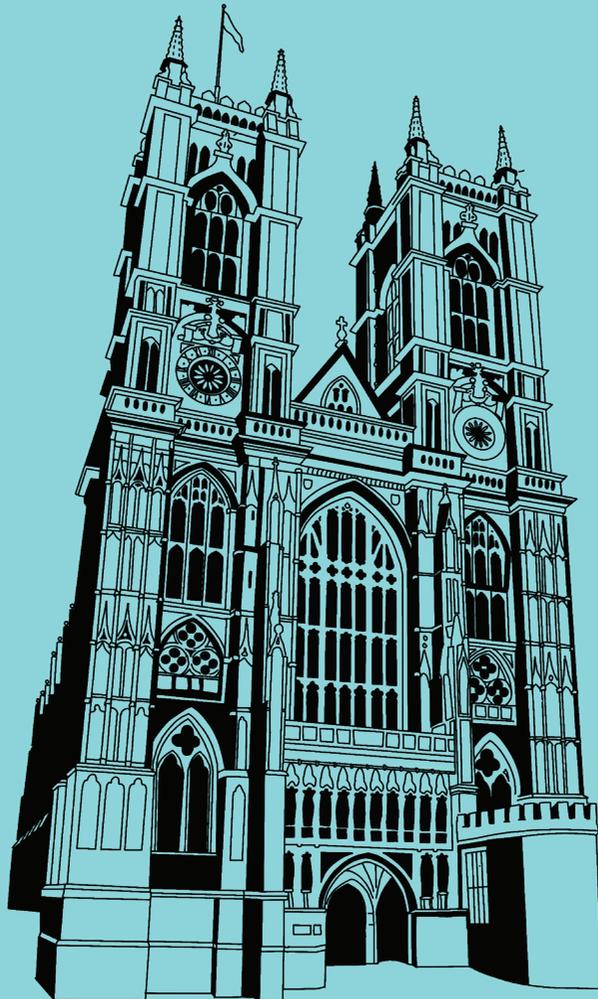
¹⁰ Davie and Martin, p.194.

5

Impact and influence

'The Queen's legacy and example live on, but the certainty she provided has ended. Change is coming to Britain and to its monarchy's role in the United Kingdom, the Commonwealth and the world – and it may be coming faster than anyone expects.'

RICHARD J EVANS¹



In summary:

- The events of the funeral and mourning period positively impacted how a significant proportion of churchgoers perceived Christianity. Just under a third of churchgoers said the events improved their perception of Christianity and the Church, while a quarter said it improved their perception of the Bible. These events again bring to light the importance of both the Queen and the public presentation of Christianity in supporting Christian confidence
- The events did not change perceptions of Christianity among the wider population either positively or negatively – just 10% of the population said the mourning period improved their perception of Christianity and the Church, and only 7% the Bible. Positive change was not limited to churchgoers or Christians but people with no religion were very unlikely to report positive change
- While there is widespread support for Christianity in royal state events, this does not appear to be reflected in personal lives. Our data supports wider observations that demand for Christian funerals is falling and demand for secular funerals is rising
- The Queen's funeral did not impact many in the population on the religious flavour of their own funeral plans. Just 4% said it made them more likely to want elements of Christianity, while 2% said less likely

¹'How the Queen Changed Britain' (2022), *New Statesman* <<https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/history/2022/09/how-the-queen-changed-britain>> [accessed 3 March 2023].

Religion –and perhaps even a sense of the sacred – was more present across the public life of the country than it has been for decades

Growing faith

The events of the mourning period had a considerable impact on active Christians – one in three said their perception of Christianity improved

The week of the official mourning period placed Britain into a transitional period where profane, normal life was interrupted. Experiences of this week are as numerous as those who lived them, but regardless of personal participation an undeniable quality of this time, as we have seen in the previous chapter, is that it was permeated with religious symbolism and practice. From the pilgrimage of the Queue for the Lying-in-State which expressed ancient religious instincts and yearnings, to the overt Christian character of a Christian funeral for a Christian monarch, religion –and perhaps even a sense of the sacred – was more present across the public life of the country than it has been for decades.

Context

Given this unique cultural moment for Christianity and the monarchy in the twenty-first century, we were curious to understand what impact, if any, people felt the mourning period had on their perceptions of the monarchy and aspects of Christianity.

When it comes to people’s own assessments of their views on elements of Christianity, we see relatively little reported change across the population as a whole. We asked all of our participants, regardless of whether they had engaged in the mourning period, what effect (if any) the mourning period and associated events had on their perceptions of:

- The Bible
- Christianity
- The Church

Across all three statements, the overwhelming response was that the events made ‘no difference’, ranging from 81% to 84%. Where there was a change the sample feel their perception improved rather than diminished.²

In contrast to many parts of this survey, there are no strong differences in age groups across these three questions. While young people are more likely than older people and the national average to say their perception diminished,

²The range of scale options was: significantly improved, slightly improved, no difference, slightly diminished, significantly diminished, don’t know.

'What effect, if any, did the mourning period have on your perception of': (Shown: Improved (sum) and diminished (sum))

Base: All adults in England and Wales, n=3035

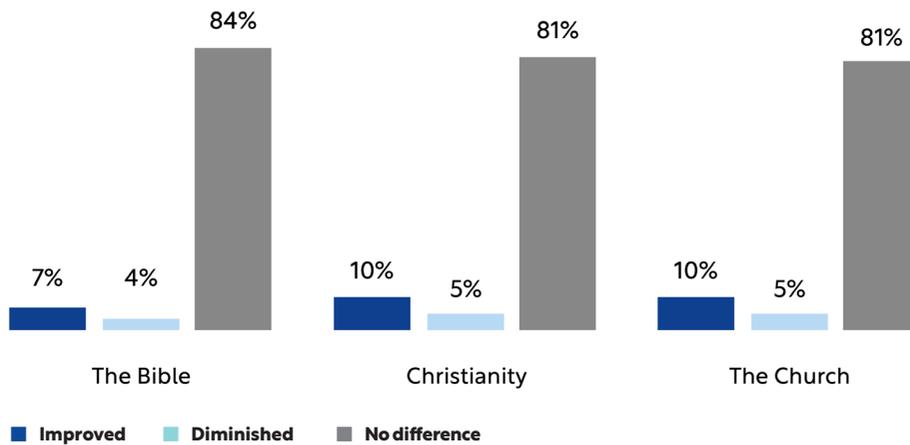


Chart 5.1: Effect of mourning period on perception of elements of the Christian faith

'What effect, if any, did the mourning period and associated events have on your perception of: (improved, sum)

Base: All Adults in England & Wales, n=3035

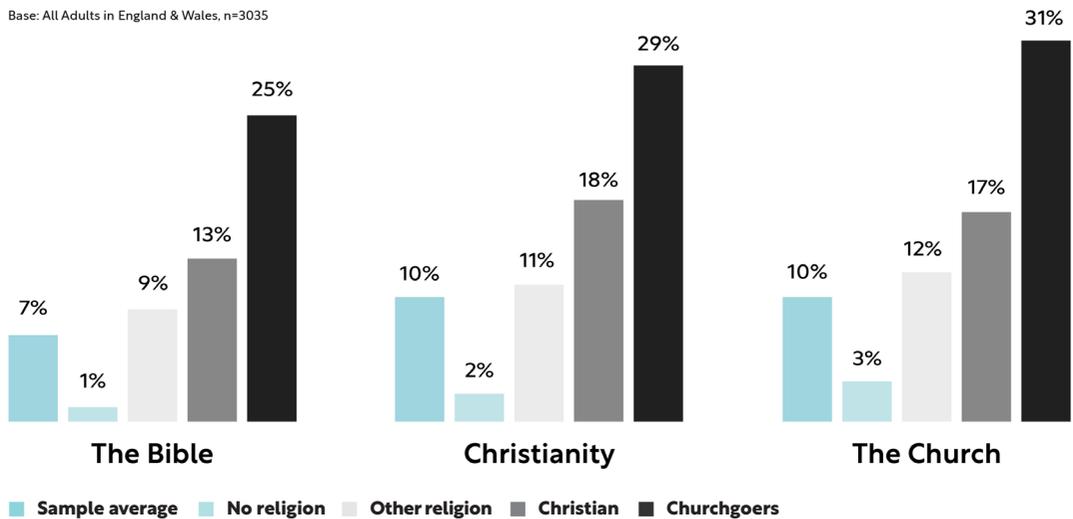


Chart 5.2: Effect of mourning period on perception of elements of the Christian faith by religion/worldview

the difference is not notably higher. They tend to follow the national average on whether their perceptions improved.

By religion, people with no religion are notably less likely than the national average to say their perception of the Bible, Christianity and the Church improved through this period. However, they are not notably above average when it comes to diminished perceptions.

Christians are significantly more likely than average to say their perceptions improved, and few said their perceptions have diminished. The greatest effect, however, is seen among churchgoing Christians (see chart 5.2). Here, improved perceptions are far above the national average, and even among Christians in general. One in four (25%) churchgoing Christians said the mourning period improved their perception of the Bible, 29% said their perception of the Bible improved, and nearly one in three (31%) said their perception of the Church improved.

Echoing our observations on the influence of the Queen on Christians in Chapter 1, we see here that the period of national mourning had a remarkable influence on a significant proportion of the active Church. While some might have hoped for greater impact among those at a distance from Christianity, this positive change for churchgoers should not be brushed aside. Rather, it might cause us to reflect on what we can learn on the importance of public Christianity and Bible for Church confidence.

25%

**churchgoing
Christians said the
mourning period
improved their
perception of the
Bible**

Public Christianity, private funerals

There is appreciation for the role of Christianity in public royal life, but demand for Christian funerals in personal lives is falling.

Throughout this report we've observed both support for and lack of hostility toward Christianity and the Bible in state public events, particularly in relation to royal rites of passage and ritual. But as the population increasingly reject the label of Christianity for themselves, what if any demand is there for Christianity in the personal sphere, and did the events of the Queen's funeral change this?

Where statistics are available, the evidence shows a declining demand for Christian funerals. The 2019 Statistics for Mission compiled and released by the Church of England revealed a further decline in the number of funerals conducted by the Church, down 31% from 2009.³ Similarly, a report released by Co-op Funerals in 2019 revealed 77% of Co-op's funeral directors said requests for funerals to take place outside of traditional religious settings had increased in the last five years. In the corresponding survey of 4,000 British adults, delivered by YouGov, 27% of the population said they want a non-religious service for their funeral.⁴

We asked all participants in our survey 'Do you want elements of Christianity within your funeral?' Deviating significantly from this previous research, 44% of adults in our sample said they want a 'fully secular funeral (i.e. non-religious)'. 9% said they want a funeral reflective of another faith/faiths, while 30% want elements of Christianity. Of these, 12% want a fully Christian funeral and 18% want some aspects of Christianity (e.g. a Bible reading or the Lord's prayer).

Women are more likely than men to say they would like elements of Christianity, while men are more likely to say they want a fully secular funeral. People from Black, Asian and other Minority ethnicities are less likely than average to say they want at least some elements of Christianity. However,

44%

of adults said
they want a fully
secular funeral

³ The Church of England Research and Statistics Team, 'Statistics for Mission 2019' (2020), *The Church of England* <<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/2019StatisticsForMission.pdf>> [accessed 7 February 2023]. 2019 figures shown to account for any possible impact of the covid-19 pandemic in 2021.

⁴ Emily Penkett, 'Burying Traditions, the Changing Face of UK Funerals' (2019), *Co-op Funeral Care - Colleague Stories* <<https://colleaguestories.coop.co.uk/2019/08/29/burying-traditions-the-changing-face-of-uk-funerals/>> [accessed 17 February 2023].

'Do you want elements of Christianity within your funeral?'

Base: All Adults in England & Wales, n=3035

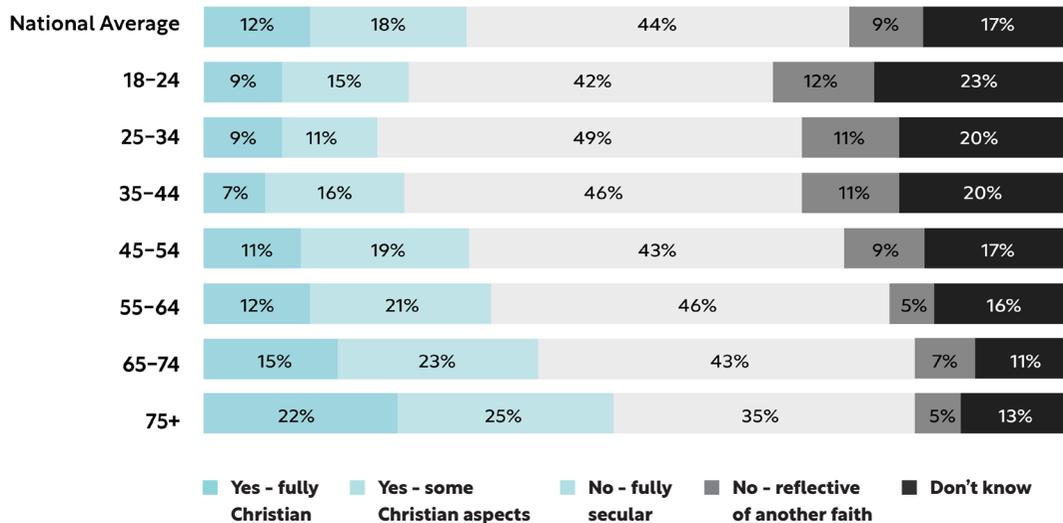
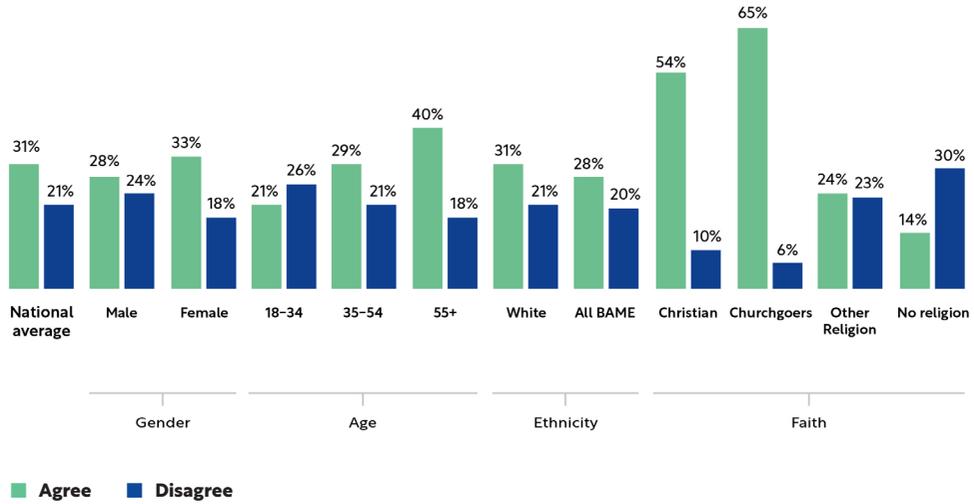


Chart 5.3: Religious dimensions of funeral wishes, by age

**A state royal event, such as a wedding or a funeral, should be wholly Christian
(Shown: Agree and Disagree)**

Base: All adults in England and Wales, n=3035



Do you want elements of Christianity within your funeral? (Shown: Yes and No)

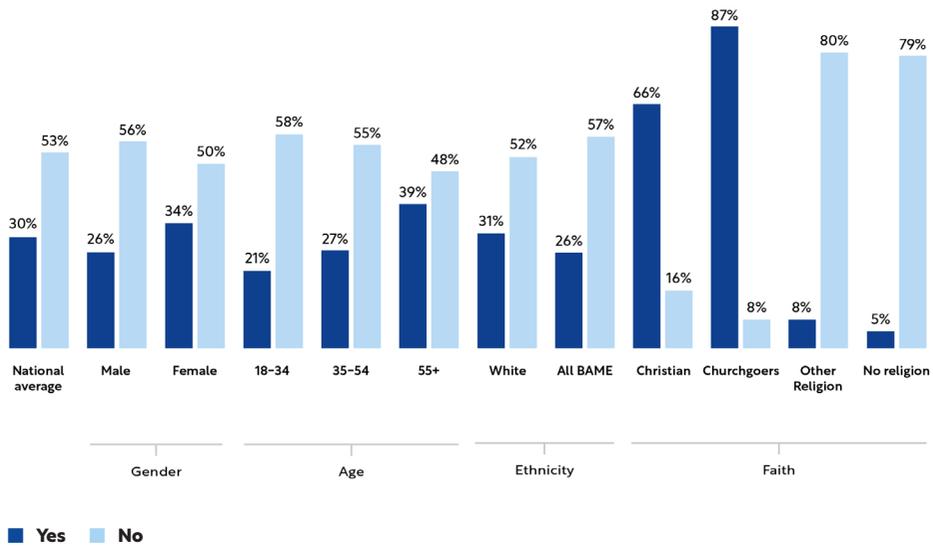


Chart 5.4/5.5: Comparison between attitudes to Christianity in state royal events and in personal funerals

people from Black ethnic groups report significantly higher than average desire for a Christian funeral – 44% within these groups say they want a fully Christian funeral, and a further 19% want some Christian aspects.

Unlike previous sections in this report, we don't see very clear generational shift on preference for funerals by age. While older people (particularly the over-75s) are considerably more likely than younger people to say they want elements of Christianity in their funeral, younger people are not notably more likely to say they want a fully secular funeral. They are more likely to say they don't know, perhaps because they haven't thought about it given their life stage. As new generations journey through life without Christianity as a familiar and reliable source to draw from, communicating what Christianity and the Church have to offer in marking rites of passage will become increasingly pressing.

We also asked our participants whether their experience of the death of the Queen had any impact on their decision regarding the religious character of their funeral. While the vast majority of the sample (89%) said it hadn't made a difference either way 4% said it made them more likely to want elements of Christianity in their funeral, and 2% said less likely. For the most part, we see no notable deviation from these averages, with two exceptions. 12% of people from Black ethnic groups and 15% of churchgoers said they were more likely to want elements of Christianity in their funeral.

When compared to the findings discussed in chapter 4, we start to see the difference between perceptions of the role of the Church in public and private spaces. At the most symbolically significant moments of British royal state life there remains, across all religious and non-religious groups, a desire to see Christianity at the heart. Likewise, there is little desire for the introduction of non-Christian or secular elements. The Church appears to be viewed as appropriate and fitting for such occasions, and still trusted to guide the public through these periods of national significance. For personal moments of grief, however, the Church seems to provide less appeal, except increasingly to the people closest to it.

Older people are considerably more likely than younger people to say they want elements of Christianity in their funeral

Concluding reflections

The remarkable events following the Queen's death were moments of unprecedented presence for public Christianity in twenty-first-century Britain. As we outlined in Chapter 4, there was deep appreciation for the place and voice of Christianity from the public as a whole, with little appetite for change in the future. Nonetheless, the data explored in this chapter reveals the mourning period had little effect on public opinion either positive or negative, at least in ways our participants felt confident expressing.

In this chapter we've also observed similarly low impact for the Queen's funeral on personal funeral wishes. Through asking this, we can see continued challenges for the Church – particularly the Church of England – in an appetite for Christian funerals. Nonetheless, young people have, unsurprisingly, not made up their minds, and on funerals neither a secular or Christian future should be assumed to be a given.

Finishing in some ways where this report started, we can reflect on the strong minority of churchgoers who reported their perceptions of the Bible, Christianity and the Church improved as a result of the mourning period. There are a number of interpretations we could make. The events of the official mourning period brought the life of the Queen, including her faith, deeply to life. Given what we observed in Chapter 1, this could be another manifestation of the importance of the Queen in building Christian faith. Not entirely separate is the possibility that there is something about Christianity elevated and positively represented in the public square that grows confidence in some Christians. Those who seek to support the Church in the coming years may wish to consider the importance of positive public reputation for church confidence at large.

Conclusion

Christian mourning for a Christian monarch – in a Christian country?

Two months after the events discussed in this report, data released from the 2021 Census showed that, for the first time, England and Wales were no longer majority Christian nations. The number of those identifying as Christians had dropped for the second successive decade, while a growing number were identifying as having ‘no religion’. While debates will no doubt continue into the place of religion in public life, this research demonstrates that when it comes to royal events at least, Christianity and the Bible still have a valued and recognised role to play.

We have shown that the Queen was admired as an individual but was also often a positive influence in her Christian faith, changing perspectives on the Church, the Bible, and Christianity as a whole. This was reflected in her mourning period and funeral events, which had Christian ritual and Scripture at their very foundation throughout. The Bible was an ever-present feature, and an audience of tens of millions in Britain alone were exposed to Christian Scripture on numerous occasions. The prominence of Christianity was not only broadly well received by the audience, it was viewed as appropriate and fitting for a funeral of a Christian monarch – and, significantly, for royal events as a whole. We saw that people are more likely to agree that these events should remain wholly Christian than either to incorporate other faith elements or become wholly secular. While this did not correlate with a high proportion of people looking to incorporate Christian elements into their own funerals, it is clear that there remains a significant space for Christianity, the Church, and the Bible at the central ritual moments of British public life.

Reflection

The mourning events for Queen Elizabeth marked a unique moment in modern British religious history, and offered a unique opportunity to gain an understanding into religion in modern Britain. This research sought to capture this opportunity by gathering the experiences and perceptions of these events among the general public. But this has also opened up new questions, challenges, and points for reflection as we welcome a new monarch.

The findings in this report offer a snapshot insight into this period, and particularly into public opinion around the specific religious elements that lay at the heart of these mourning ceremonies. But they also speak to wider

The prominence of Christianity was not only broadly well received by the audience, it was viewed as appropriate and fitting for a funeral of a Christian monarch – and, significantly, for royal events as a whole

themes in contemporary religion, and particularly the role of Christianity, Scripture, and the Church in modern Britain.

As we have noted throughout the report, this was a remarkable moment for Bible communication in modern history. The scale of coverage and reach, alongside the consistency of Bible references meant millions encountered the Bible who otherwise wouldn't have done. This was particularly the case among younger people, with 40% saying they heard bits of the Bible they had never heard before. It is easy to argue that this was the largest public Scripture event in history, even if it wasn't primarily intended as such. Despite this, however, our research has also shown that younger audiences were significantly more likely to find the Bible passages boring than moving or personally relevant, while very few of our respondents said it had any impact on their perception of the Bible. Young people and those of other faiths were also more likely to say the Bible was difficult to understand. If, as is likely, cultural familiarity with the Bible continues to fade, Bible communicators will need to be increasingly sensitive to both accessibility of language and bridging the personal relevancy gap.

Within this report we have also seen a difference in perception between the role of Christianity in large public rituals (such as royal funerals) and in their own personal funerals. This issue poses a challenge to church leaders: How can the Church bridge the gap between seeing the significance and value of Christian language and practice in national 'life' events and personal life events? The findings are not saying that people don't see any meaning in the Christian rituals, but rather that they seemingly don't see how the practices are personally meaningful to them. However, Christian and biblical reflections, teachings, and literature on life and death have offered solace, comfort and hope for billions throughout history and around the world. There is no reason to believe this should be different in the twenty-first century, provided the Church can adapt to society as it is now, as it has done around the world for centuries.

Finally, this research shows that the Queen was not only deeply popular, but also generally had a positive influence on public perception of the Bible, the Church, and, in particular, Christianity. This was significantly higher among regular churchgoers, but nevertheless we still see over one-fifth of the population labelling her as a positive influence on their perception of Christianity, and all groups more likely to see her as a positive than negative influence. For churchgoers we have also seen the importance of her funeral in shaping their perceptions of their faith, demonstrating the importance of a public presentation of Christianity and Christian role models to Church confidence. It is clear, that she was a notable and admired public Christian

figure across her long life, with the question therefore arising – who, if anyone, will be the one to become an analogous Christian influencer for the coming decades?

The coronation, Christianity, and the future

This report is being written and published in that liminal period between the funeral of one monarch and the coronation of a second, with Charles still awaiting his full ritual welcome into the crown and throne. The coronation is a ceremony unlike any other in British society. However, as with the Queen's funeral, it is deeply inspired by Christian practice and Scripture and taking place in a Christian place of worship. It is, undoubtedly and inescapably, a deeply Christian ritual. Questions have already been raised as to whether this is suitable given the religious landscape of contemporary Britain, with advocates of secularism in particular pushing for the removal of Christian aspects from such a significant ceremony. Yet again, as with the funeral, it appears that popular opinion is in favour of this remaining a Christian occasion. Previous research has found that 57% of people believe the coronation should be a Christian ceremony, compared with 19% who think it should be multi-faith and 23% who think it should be secular¹. Again, this was not solely the case of Christians feeling this way, but was seen across religious and non-religious groups. Combined with the findings of this report, we have clear evidence that public support remains in favour of prominent Christian presence at high occasions of state.

Beyond the coronation, however, the future is perhaps harder to predict. The extent of the Queen's personal influence on the perception of the relationship between faith and the monarchy may only be seen in the reign of Charles, or even William, particularly if they take different approaches with regards to their openness on the topic or are less personally popular than the Queen. With the percentage of the population identifying as Christian likely to continue to decline for the immediate future at least, and the make-up of churchgoers to continue to diversify, attitudes towards the relationship between Scripture and the state, the Church and the Crown, will undoubtedly continue to evolve, if in often unexpected ways.

¹Theos/ComRes, 'Theos – Coronation Polling'

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In September 2022 Britain mourned the death of a reigning monarch for the first time in over 70 years.

The mourning events, which at their heart were deeply indebted to Christian rituals and that have been present in everyday Anglican funerals for centuries, were broadcast around the world. What resulted was an unprecedented public Scripture event reaching tens of millions in Britain alone. Taking place in the context of a country that is no longer majority Christian, the prominence of these overtly religious events presented fascinating questions around the role of religion in modern Britain.

We found a nation that was favourable towards the Queen herself and towards the monarchy, albeit with considerably more warmth among older people and Christian groups. A quarter of those who engaged with the funeral said they heard elements of the Bible they had never heard before. The vast majority – across all age groups, ethnicities, and religious beliefs – found the prominence of Christianity to be appropriate not only because of the Queen’s personal faith but more generally for a British royal event. This report explores a moment in history while raising crucial questions around the continuing role of religion in the private and public spheres as we enter a new era of British life.



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