

# National Religions

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

In this tutorial, you'll look at how religion and civil affairs are related, connected, and dependent upon each other or not. In a theocracy, where the government rules by religious authority, God is considered to be the civil ruler and/or the rulers are considered to be divinely guided. Theocracy as a form of governing is not entirely uncommon. In fact, it has been a large part of many institutional and religious traditions for quite a long time. The idea of a national religion, on the other hand, has to do with government-sanctioned institutions of religious practice. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. [The Roman Catholic Church](#)

2. [The Church of England](#)

## 1. The Roman Catholic Church

Government-sanctioned institutions of religious practice at times reveal a union of church and state and separation with clear dominions for each. It might be most useful, first of all, to think of religions and nations in terms of the history of the Roman Catholic Church. It was the first hugely influential church body that was so intimately linked with civil and state affairs. The first officially legalized religion in the fourth century was Roman Catholicism. In this sense, Roman Catholicism was the **state religion**.

With the decline of the Roman Empire, the Roman Catholic Church also struggled for a broad and solid foothold. Eventually, it gained its ground by having to yield to the East and then focus its energies on Europe and the West. It wasn't until the 16th century in Germany and England that protests against the supreme and longstanding rule of the Roman papacy began to be fruitful.



### TERM TO KNOW

#### State Religion

A religious body or creed officially endorsed by the state.

## 2. The Church of England

This break with Roman Catholicism, initiated by Martin Luther in Germany and King Henry VIII in England, allowed for a government's alternative religious affiliation and religious direction. What resulted in England was a **national church** called the Church of England, also known as the Anglican Church. The decidedly Anglican endeavor had the desire to return to the simplicity of apostolic succession. This was the idea that the church ministry is a continuous line of wisdom and guidance that began with Jesus Christ and the twelve apostles.

In the modern context of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, the Church of England saw and sees itself today as a middle way between the two. Today, Anglicanism is the national religion of England. It is tied in various ways to the parliamentary system with some bishops occupying special seats in parliament. This reunion of church and state, of course, is the complement of separation of church and state.



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### **National Church**

A concept of a Christian church associated with a specific ethnic group or nation state.



#### SUMMARY

There are many ways in which religion and government, religious life and civilian life, can be involved and dependent upon each other. Theocracy demonstrates that there have been, and still are, many cases where religion and civilian life are quite intertwined. Governmental organizations look to religious authorities for their support, guidance, and understanding. **The Roman Catholic Church** was the state religion for much of the Roman Empire. Changes occurred to the Roman Empire throughout Europe, England particularly, that led to the development of **the Church of England** through its break with Roman Catholicism. Anglicanism is the state religion of England to this day.

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