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The House of Windsor and the Future of the Faith

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Great Britain calmly received the recent news that Charles, Prince of Wales, would soon welcome Ms. Camilla Parker Bowles as his live-in companion at Clarence House, the former home of the Queen Mother. Charles, age 54, and Camilla [divorced from her husband] will live together in an acknowledged sexual relationship, but without marriage.

The outcry has been rather muted. After all, it's hard to muster outrage about the House of Windsor. Scandals have followed the family throughout the last thirty years, and the current crop of royals seem determined to exceed their ancestors in mess-making. Of Queen Elizabeth II's four offspring, three were messily divorced and the British people seem now to take it in stride.

This mess is sure to get messier. "Here we have a future governor of the Church of England, as Charles would be when named king, living in a domestic relationship without paper or clergy with a woman with whom he committed adultery," notes Anne Kingston in the National Post.

But Buckingham Palace seems more concerned with financial scandal than adultery. A spokesman for the Queen explained that Charles would pay for the decorating and furnishing of Camilla's rooms in the palace out of his own personal funds. The Queen seems reconciled to Charles' adultery and co-habitation, but the finances must be above board. Don't say she lacks scruples.

The Queen and Prince Philip have proved to be spectacularly unsuccessful parents, at least if the moral conduct of their children is to be any concern. The Queen has also been an ineffectual governor of the Church of England. Heretics and heresies have multiplied like rabbits under her rule, and some of the church's bishops deny the basic and essential doctrines of the faith. This royal house seems determined to keep a stiff upper lip while accepting a very flexible set of doctrines.

But Queen Elizabeth II at least accepted the title "Defender of the Faith" when she was coronated in 1953. The title, first granted to Henry VIII by Pope Leo X in 1521, became a central part of the royal investiture when Elizabeth I was crowned in 1559. Since then, every British monarch has been crowned "Defender of the Faith"—and that faith was Christianity. Not for long.

Elizabeth II will be the last of the British sovereigns to accept the title. Prince Charles has declared that he will accept only a revised version of the title, "Defender of Faith." Charles, who gives evidence of being on one long quest to find himself, is a portrait of New Age religious confusion. He has dabbled in Hinduism and Buddhism, and apparently believes in reincarnation. He fell under the influence of New Age thinker Laurens van der Post, and often sounds like he's leading a New Age seminar.

“All the great prophets,” Charles explains, “all the great thinkers, all those who have achieved an awareness of the aspects of life which lie beneath the surface, all have showed the same understanding of the universe or the nature of God or the purpose of our existence—and that is why I think it is so important to understand the common threads which link us in one great and important tapestry.” This is, of course, patently untrue. Upon closer inspection, the major belief systems of the world are seen to be more distinct, rather than more similar. But in Charles’ royal religion seminar, everyone always agrees.

So Charles will be crowned “Defender of Faith,” or at least this is his plan. “I personally would rather see it as Defender of Faith, not the Faith, because it [Defender of the Faith] means just one particular interpretation of the Faith, which is sometimes something that causes a deal of a problem,” he explains. Sometimes something that causes a deal of a problem? Who talks like that?

Charles, if he ever becomes king, will be Britain’s first postmodern monarch. Rather than serve as a moral example to his people, Charles will openly commit adultery, move out from his wife, mourn at her funeral, move in with his divorced lover, and eventually, it is assumed, demand to marry her.

America has experienced a postmodern president who wasn’t sure what it means and now England has an heir to the throne who doesn’t care what the faith is, and neither of these men let Christian morality get in the way of their sex lives.

According to recent statistical reports, cohabitation without marriage is now commonplace in Britain and 38% of all children are born out of wedlock. Only a fraction of the British people profess an active faith or attend church services. The church now faces the threat of schism over homosexuality and homosexual marriage, even as some of its bishops deny the resurrection and other essential doctrines.

Prince Charles seems well tuned for the times—the perfect representative of post-Christian Britain. Of this we can be certain: When Charles takes the crown as “Defender of Faith,” it won’t be the faith once for all delivered to the saints that he defends.

