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Defender of Faith? Throne Language for the Postmodern Prince

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HRH Charles, Prince of Wales, turned 60 last week. This makes Prince Charles the longest-living heir to the throne in British history. It also raises the question of whether he will ever be king. After all, if Queen Elizabeth II lives only as long as her mother, that means adding another twenty years to her reign. The Man who Would Be King would then be 80 himself. The math is not on his side.

Even so, the Prince has been working on changes he proposes to the 1953 Royal Titles Act. The most significant proposal is this — Prince Charles, if crowned as King, wants to be known as “Defender of Faith” rather than “Defender of the Faith.” This represents a seismic shift, but it perfectly fits the postmodern Prince.

As *The Telegraph* [London] reported:

The Prince caused controversy within the Anglican church when he floated the idea several years ago of becoming Defender of the Faiths in an attempt to embrace the other religions in Britain.

In a compromise he has now opted for Defender of Faith which he hopes will unite the different strands of society, and their beliefs, at his Coronation.

The original title, Defender of the Faith, was granted to King Henry VIII in 1521. Pope Leo X was impressed by King Henry’s defense of the Catholic faith against the Lutheran threat, granting him the title as a reward. King Henry had written *The Defense of the Seven Sacraments* as an indictment of Martin Luther and his theology. But, of course, a later pope would have a very different view of Henry VIII after the king broke with Rome and established the Church of England with himself as its supreme head. Henry VIII and future monarchs would retain the title, “Defender of the Faith,” as a seal of their primacy within the Anglican church.

But, of course, this means defending a very specific form of a very specific faith — the Christian faith. Pope Leo did not designate Henry VIII as the defender of religion, nor of faith in general (impossible conceptions in the sixteenth century) but as Defender of *the* Faith.

Prince Charles is, even by the standards of British royalty, something of an odd duck. When his engagement to Lady Diana Spencer was announced in 1981, the Prince was asked if he was in love with Diana. Yes, he answered, “whatever that means.” It was not a good sign that Prince Charles evidently did not know what falling in love means.

Now, he desires to be known, as king, as Defender of Faith. Faith, in other words, “whatever that means.”

Some years ago, Prince Charles began to display patterns of thought that are distinctly New Age. He is known to be influenced by the writings and personal influence of the late Laurens van der Post, a major New Age thinker. When the



Prince of Wales speaks on issues of public importance, he often sounds like a New Age intellectual. In other words, he is often virtually impossible to understand.

The issue of the investiture and coronation language is very easy to understand, however. A future King Charles does not want to defend the Christian faith, but all faiths — even faith itself.

As *The Telegraph* reported,

A Clarence House spokesman said: “There has been work done on the accession planning as you would expect however there has been no planning of the Coronation or its contents.” The Prince has been advised on the accession by Sir Stephen Lamport, his former Private Secretary, who was a senior civil servant.

Vernon Bogdanor, the constitutionalist who is Professor of Government at Oxford University, said: “In 1952, when the Queen came to the throne, it was very much an Anglican society. The Prince of Wales will become head of a nation which is multi-denominational.

“The Prince has said that he wants to be seen as a defender of all religious faiths and not just the Anglican church but the Coronation is an Anglican ceremony. Any change would require legislation.”

Prince Charles originally wanted to be known as “Defender of Faiths,” but will now settle for “Defender of Faith,” according to sources close to the Prince. Just a few years ago, Prince Charles commented:

All the great prophets, 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.

Anyone who looks closely at this statement will recognize immediately that it is false. The various religions of the world are not talking about the same divine reality, nor revealing “the same understanding of the universe or the nature of God or the purpose of our existence.” To the contrary, there is no generic “faith” in any meaningful sense of the word.

This news out of Great Britain tells us a great deal about the future of the House of Windsor and, in its own way, about the future of the British people. The public decline of the Church of England is nothing less than tragic, but grave theological compromises preceded its statistical free fall.

Nevertheless, far beyond the green and pleasant land of Britain, this news also tells us a great deal about how so many people understand faith. They see it as a substance or stance without any necessary object or referent. In this view, it all comes down to mere faith, and faith *in* faith — and faith in *any* faith.

Christianity makes a claim to being the faith, indeed the faith “once for all delivered to the saints” [Jude 3]. That is the faith that deserves our defense, for it is faith in Christ, and in Christ alone, that saves.

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