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Churchman

EDITORIAL

Honi soit qui mal y pense

Those who follow the vagaries of political correctness will be well aware that countries everywhere are being pushed into a world governed by ‘equality’ and ‘inclusion’. ‘Equality’ in this context means that everyone has the right to be exactly the same as everybody else, and for that to happen properly, those who are privileged must come down a few notches and integrate with the plebs. ‘Inclusion’ means that those who accept the norms of political correctness must be tolerated, whatever their other defects may be, whereas those who disagree must be marginalised because they have shown themselves to be unworthy of participating fully in modern life. In this category one may find anyone—from members of the British National Party to hoteliers who do not want gay couples in their establishments or doctors who refuse to perform abortions. In their different ways, such people are regarded as neo-Fascists who deserve the opprobrium of society, and the media glitterati ensure that they receive it in full measure.

In the UK the levellers of political correctness have done very well recently. Christians who have expressed disapproval of the homosexual agenda have been dismissed from their employment, even when they work for agencies sponsored by the Church of England, and universities know that it is in their best interests to recruit students from among the underqualified, as long as the latter represent some identifiable minority or a group that has suffered discrimination in the past. However, some institutions are harder to change than others. Ten years ago the Labour government tried to reform the House of Lords, but it was only partly successful and further plans for change seem to have been lost in the parliamentary undergrowth. Hereditary peers were meant to disappear, but instead they are now represented by about ten percent of their number, who elect them as vacancies occur. Thus it is that a peer who wants to make a career in politics can still do so without too much difficulty.

The monarchy is the most traditional and unmovable institution of all, and because of its unique position and symbolic role, the levellers are itching to get their hands on it. The chattering classes in places like London and Sydney

would love to see it abolished altogether, but it survives by popular demand, as an Australian referendum on the subject demonstrated in 1999. It cannot be removed overnight, but it can be altered in subtle ways which may adversely affect its long-term future. At present two changes are being proposed, one involving female succession and the other the exclusion of Roman Catholics from the royal family.

The female succession issue is relatively minor and can be disposed of fairly quickly. For many centuries there was no rule about it one way or the other, but it became a matter of urgency in 1135, when Henry I died, leaving only his daughter Matilda to succeed him. The barons could not accept this, because to them a monarch had to be able to lead an army in the field, and so they chose Stephen, a cousin of Matilda's, as king instead. This provoked a civil war that went on for nearly two decades, until it was finally agreed that after Stephen died the throne would pass, not to Matilda directly, but to her son and heir, who in 1154 was duly crowned as Henry II. The principle that a woman could not rule but could transmit the right of succession to her son, was invoked by King Edward III after the French king died, leaving only a daughter, who happened to be Edward's mother, as his heiress. The French nobility would have none of this and invented the so-called Salic Law, which barred female succession altogether and led to the hundred years' war between England and France. France won, and the Salic Law spread to other countries on the continent, but it was never accepted in England. When Henry Tudor defeated and killed Richard III in 1485, he claimed the crown through inheritance from his mother, Lady Margaret Beaufort, a descendant of Edward III, who was still alive and in good health. It was Henry VIII, a man not usually known as a promoter of women's rights, who established the present pattern by which females can succeed to the throne, but only after their male siblings. As it turned out, both daughters eventually ruled England, one badly and the other remarkably well.

Compared to other European monarchies, the English/British one has always been relatively pro-female. Its most coveted order of chivalry owes its origins to a lady whose garter slipped at court, an occasion which had Edward III crying shame on anyone who thought badly of the unfortunate woman. Queens consort have often played a prominent role in the nation's life and queens regnant have generally been very popular and successful. There would therefore seem to be no valid objection to this change, which will probably be generally welcomed.

It is a different matter when it comes to the exclusion of Roman Catholics. Here the nation suffers from the woeful ignorance of almost everyone who is in a position to influence the course of events. Most people seem to believe that when Henry VIII broke with Rome in 1534, he invented the Church of England and made himself its head in order to legitimise his divorce from Catherine of Aragon, and that since that time, his successors have all been bound to belong to this somewhat dubious creation, an obligation which is symbolised by the royal title 'Defender of the Faith'. This is false. The queen is 'Defender of the Faith' not because she is the supreme governor of the Church of England, but because Pope Leo X granted the title to Henry VIII as a reward for a book which Henry wrote condemning Martin Luther. In other words, Henry was defending Catholicism against Protestantism, not the other way round! He did make himself 'supreme head' of the Churches of England and Ireland, but his daughter Elizabeth I was persuaded to change that to 'supreme governor', in recognition of the fact that Christ alone is head of the church, and far from inventing a new denomination, he left the old institution more or less intact.

There was however no obligation on Elizabeth or on any other monarch to submit to the doctrines and polity of the national church. On the contrary, Tudor monarchs believed that the church should submit to them. When Mary I ascended the throne in 1553, she immediately restored communion with Rome, to which parliament readily agreed. When Elizabeth took over in 1558, the process went into reverse, but again parliament was happy to go along with her wishes. Only in the seventeenth century did it gradually become clear that the sovereign must submit to the church as established by parliament or lose his throne. Charles I contested this bitterly, and went to his death believing that he was a martyr for the divine right of kings. His son Charles II was attracted to Roman Catholicism but was wise enough to delay his conversion until he was on his deathbed. His younger brother James though, was less sensible.

In spite of himself, James became one of the most radical reshapers of British politics and government. In his early years, he led the English navy in battle against the Dutch and was rewarded by having the colony of New Amsterdam renamed after him. Part of it became New York because James was Duke of York, and part of it became New Jersey, because he was also Earl of Jersey! In those days he was a Protestant, married to Anne Hyde, the daughter of the Earl of Clarendon, by whom he had two daughters. The elder one, Mary, married

William III of Orange and the younger was betrothed to the less colourful prince George of Denmark, both of them solid Protestants.

Anne Hyde died young and James converted to Roman Catholicism, marrying an Italian princess in the process. This provoked a constitutional crisis, because many members of parliament were determined to prevent a Catholic from ascending the throne. Yet such was the strength of dynastic feeling that Charles II was able to ride out the storm caused by this so-called 'exclusionist crisis' and James was confirmed as his successor in spite of his change of religion. The exclusionist episode did, however, have one lasting result. Parliament split into factions, one of them named after Irish bandits (Tories) and the other after Scottish highwaymen (Whigs). The Tories were divine-righters and the Whigs were constitutionalists, a pattern that has gone through many mutations over the years but which still remains broadly recognisable today.

Once he became king, James II (VII of Scotland) displayed the traditional Stuart penchant for ignoring reality, and before long he had managed to alienate almost everyone. Anglicans were horrified by his proposals for religious toleration, Dissenters suspected that he was cosyng up to them only to further the cause of the Roman Antichrist and Roman Catholics were resentful that they could not enter the government even though the king was one of their number. James survived as long as he did because he was heavily subsidised by Louis XIV, who wanted him as a docile client, but Louis did not help matters by expelling the Protestants from France in the very year that James ascended the throne (1685). Parliament was prepared to put up with this because James' heirs were Protestants, but when his wife unexpectedly gave birth to a son in the summer of 1688, it had to act. Rather than accept a permanent Catholic succession, it invited Mary, James' elder daughter, to come with her husband William of Orange and assume the crown—an interesting example of how female succession was allowed to override the male one!

James tried to regain his throne by appealing to the Irish Catholics, but the result was disastrous for both him and them. Thereafter, the prospects for a Protestant succession looked good, but Mary II died in 1694 and her sister Anne buried the last of her eighteen children in 1700. The most credible heir was now her step-brother, the Old Pretender or James III (VIII) as he is sometimes known. Had James III become a Protestant he would probably have been accepted as king, but he refused to consider the possibility and so a substitute

had to be found. This was Sophia of Hanover, a descendant of James I (VI of Scotland) through his daughter Elizabeth, who had married Frederick V of the Palatinate, the man whose ambition to rule in Bohemia sparked off the disastrous Thirty Years' War in Germany. Sophia could not become the ruler of Hanover, because it was subject to the Salic Law, but she could be queen of England if she outlived Anne. As it turned out, she died only a few weeks before Anne did, so the throne passed to her son, who became King George I. This provoked the Old Pretender to invade the country, but he got nowhere. Thirty years later his son, known to us as Bonnie Prince Charlie, tried again and was surprisingly successful, but he too was defeated by the forces of King George II, who marched into battle with a new song on their lips—God Save the King.

It was against this backdrop that the Act of Succession was passed in 1701 and pressed on a somewhat reluctant Scotland, which was nudged into union with England in 1707 precisely in order to forestall the possibility that it might ask James VIII to become king after the death of Queen Anne. The shadow of James II and VII is longer than one might suppose.... Today all that seems long ago and far away, despite the fact that the defeat of James II is still commemorated by Protestants in Ireland every 12 July. In an age of equality and inclusion, it seems unfair and anachronistic to single out Roman Catholics for discrimination at the highest level of the national polity. What harm could there possibly be in allowing the sovereign the same freedom of religion that all her subjects enjoy?

The answer must begin by stating that the monarch is not a private individual, nor is her family just like any other. It has been set aside to fulfil a particular function in the nation's life, a function which requires it to behave in certain ways. One of these is to belong to the two national churches that are established by law. The Church of England is not officially in communion with the Church of Scotland, yet the Queen belongs to both. This is possible because neither claims to be the true church to the exclusion of all others and because both profess essentially the same doctrines, despite their differences in matters of church government and liturgy. Rome is a different matter altogether. Protestants tend to be extremely naive in their understanding of how the Roman church sees itself. When Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians and Baptists get together, they assume that each possesses an aspect of the truth which they want to affirm and share with the others. The reunion of the churches may be a difficult process, but the idea is that a formula can be found that will allow

each tradition to participate in a wider church structure without losing or denying its own heritage. Roman Catholics see things differently. To them, the church is not broken into many different pieces, but is eternally one and visible in the Roman communion. Other Christian bodies relate to this church on a sliding scale—Baptists may have fifty percent of the truth, Presbyterians sixty, Anglicans seventy and the Eastern Orthodox ninety, but only those in communion with the See of St. Peter can claim to possess the full 100 percent. Obviously, nobody in that position is going to want to compromise it, so ecumenism can only mean trying to find a way to persuade the others to top up their deficiencies by embracing the complete package which Rome has to offer.

That package includes recognising that the head of the church is a sovereign ruler, equal (if not superior) in dignity to any other head of state. A Catholic monarch of the United Kingdom would therefore be subject, at least in spiritual matters, to a foreign prince. In a country which barely tolerates membership of the European Union, such a prospect is unlikely to go down well, however insignificant it may turn out to be in practice—at least most of the time. But if the queen were to become a Roman Catholic without taking her people with her, her constitutional position would become precarious, if not untenable. She could not belong to either of the Kingdom's established churches, and could hardly function as the supreme governor of the Church of England. Furthermore, once a Roman Catholic gained the crown, it would never pass out of Catholic hands. The notion that everyone should have a turn ('equality') would be rejected outright by the papacy, which would do everything in its power to ensure an everlasting Catholic succession. That would put a stop to the coronation ceremony, since no Catholic sovereign could submit to being crowned by a schismatic or heretical archbishop, and one of the central ways in which the sovereign's rule is legitimised would be removed.

It would also have to ensure that a Catholic sovereign was a credit to her church and a good example to others in it. Most ordinary Catholics are much more liberal than their church on matters like birth control and ecumenism, but a public figure would be expected to conform to the church's official position. This was demonstrated in 1997, when the newly-elected President Mary McAleese of Ireland took communion in Christ Church, Dublin and was immediately rebuked by the local Catholic archbishop, who pointed out that no Catholic head of state was allowed to do such a thing. In practice, a Catholic monarch

would have to be more consistently Catholic than her co-religionists in less exalted positions, because that church's hierarchy would put the spotlight on her. The significance of this became clear some years ago, when King Baudouin of the Belgians abdicated for a day rather than sign legislation that went against the moral teachings of the Catholic church. In a Catholic country like Belgium that position might be understood and accepted, but not in the UK where the royals are expected to do their job. They cannot abdicate for a day—once they go, they are gone for good. To put it bluntly, a Roman Catholic on the throne in London would be the beginning of the end of the British monarchy, which could not long survive the tensions that a contradictory religious allegiance would produce. Admittedly, the current legislation singles out Roman Catholics somewhat unfairly, then the remedy ought to be something even more unpalatable to the modern preachers of 'equality'—membership of any religion or church other than the established ones should be excluded! That way Catholics would be no more discriminated against than anyone else, but the succession would be protected from falling into unsympathetic hands.

How likely are these proposed changes to be made? It is often forgotten in Britain that the Queen reigns over fifteen countries, each of which has a say in the matter even though none of them has an established church. The British government has agreed that it will not change the Act of Succession without the unanimous consent of the other Commonwealth monarchies, but that is not necessarily the formality that most people in Britain assume it is. It may be unlikely that Tuvalu or Barbados will raise serious objections, but monarchy watchers would do well to pay close attention to a country they often overlook—Canada. As a place which drives on the right and does not play cricket or professional soccer, Canada appears to be very un-British and so is usually ignored in the mother country. But the monarchy is more firmly entrenched there than anywhere else, including the UK. The reason for this is that until 1982 Canada's constitutional arrangements could only be altered by the Westminster parliament, not because of any latent colonialist tendencies on the part of that body, but because Canadians could not agree on an amending formula. In that year, the Prime Minister of Canada, Pierre Trudeau, decided to end this anachronism by asking the British government to pass an amending formula devised by him and his colleagues. By convention, he should have obtained the unanimous consent of the Canadian provinces for this, but that was not forthcoming and he decided to go ahead anyway. To soften the blow,

he agreed that there should be certain entrenched clauses in the legislation which would ensure that matters like the monarchy and the position of the French language could only be modified by the unanimous consent of the provinces and the federal government—something which has never been achieved in the history of the confederation.

Quebec was deeply offended by Trudeau's procedure and refused to ratify it, even though it was forced to accept it in practice. So far no pressing issue has arisen to test this arrangement, but now there is the prospect of a constitutional crisis. If Quebec agrees to allow the monarchy to be modified by a change in the Act of Succession, it may be deemed to have ratified the constitutional arrangements of 1982. It may also have weakened its position if a future Canadian government decides to alter the official status of the French language, to bring it into line with current conditions (i.e. the global use of English). In such circumstances, Quebec is almost bound to refuse to do anything, and the proposed changes will therefore fail to obtain the support they require. On 13 Sept 2009 it will be 250 years since General James Wolfe fought and died in the battle that won New France for the British crown. At that time its people were subject to a ruler who was officially sponsoring the Old Pretender, and was therefore the sworn enemy of the Act of Succession. The change of sovereignty produced a new situation. Quebec will not be celebrating the defeat of 1759, but it hardly needs to. Working entirely within the framework of its own interests, its legislature, which is almost exclusively French-speaking and Roman Catholic, is liable to uphold the Protestant succession to the British throne by refusing to enact any legislation that might alter a constitution it does not officially recognise. It is a prospect which will no doubt enrage the columnists of *The Guardian* and *The Sydney Morning Herald*, but they will be powerless to do anything about it, and the French-speakers of Quebec will only enjoy irritating les Anglo-Saxons. Without particularly wanting to, an assembly of French Catholics who have no cultural loyalty to Britain, will have saved that country and its Commonwealth associates from themselves. The *status quo* is therefore likely to stay that way and the policy wonks of Whitehall would be well advised to let this sleeping dog lie and accept that their notions of 'equality' and 'inclusion' cannot be universally applied as they would wish. Truth is indeed stranger than fiction, but as Edward III said when the garter hit the floor, *honi soit qui mal y pense*.

GERALD BRAY