

UNITED KINGDOM

Charles III's coronation, a triumph of political correctness

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That England is no longer the country of St Alfred the Great or St Edward the Confessor is quite clear. The title of *Defensor fidei*, granted to King Henry VIII by Pope Leo X, was short-lived due to the English sovereign's break with the Church of Rome. But in the

House of Windsor, the title of Defender of the Faith (of course 'the' faith is the Anglican faith, the head of which is the king himself), which in 1544 Parliament attributed to Edward VI, is being outgrown. The issue was the subject of a study by two academics, Robert Hazell and Bob Morris ([Swearing in the New King: The Accession and Coronation Oaths](#)), who also proposed some possible reformulations, immediately after the death of Elizabeth II and precisely in view of the coronation of Charles III and his Queen Consort Camilla, which will take place on Saturday 6 May at Westminster Abbey.

Back in 1994 the future king had already expressed his preference to be considered 'Defender of Faith' rather than 'Defender of *the* Faith': removing the article makes the difference, i.e., favouring 'faith' in general. In more recent years he has [clarified](#) that he does not want to give up that title but that he wants to be not only 'defender of the faith' but also 'protector of faiths' in a United Kingdom that is so multi-religious that the tenant of Downing Street is Hindu and in Scotland the premier is Muslim. Religious freedom is fine, not least because the Anglican split caused the spilling of much Catholic blood for a century and a half. But the rite that will take place in Westminster, rather than by the demands of religious freedom, seems dictated by that desire to be 'inclusive' at all costs, typical of today's political correctness.

Jews, Sunni and Shia Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists, Hindus, Jains, Bahai, and Zoroastrians will take part in the initial procession. 'Multi-faith' and 'inclusion' are among the first words to be read in the ritual of 6 May ([The Authorised Liturgy for the Coronation Rite of His Majesty King Charles III](#)), which bears the 'imprimatur' of the Anglican Primate Justin Welby. A religious ceremony, let's not forget, within a service that resembles the Catholic Mass (apart from the invalidity of the Anglican sacraments). The presentation of the Bible will be made by the Moderator General of the Church of Scotland, also of a different denomination, being Presbyterian - but this is a novelty that was already introduced at the coronation of Elizabeth II in 1953. And we come to the Oath of Office, where the reference to 'people of all faiths and beliefs' is included in primate Welby's introductory words and then in the King's prayer, specially composed for the occasion.

It will be the Hindu Sunak who will proclaim the First Reading: of course, by virtue of his role as prime minister, but one is bound to wonder what sense it makes to have those who do not believe in the Lord say: "This is the word of the Lord". Then the Gospel will be entrusted to the Reverend Sarah Mullah, Anglican 'bishop' of London. We limit ourselves here to pointing out the 'pink quota', without going into the age-old question of female priesthood (about which we refer to a [felicitous expression](#) of the

current pontiff: women “must be valued, not clericalised”). The pink quota also includes the moderator of the Free Churches, the Reverend Helen Cameron, who will join for the blessing with her Anglican 'colleagues' (Stephen Cottrell, of York, and the primate Welby), Greek Orthodox (Nikitas Loulias), the general secretary of Churches Together in England (Mike Royal) and the Catholic cardinal archbishop of Westminster (Vincent Nichols).

Bipartisan is also the chrism with which the sovereign will be anointed, coming from Jerusalem, where it was jointly consecrated by the Orthodox patriarch Theophilos III and the Anglican archbishop Hosam Naoum. It is well known, moreover, that the 'pantheon' of Charles III reserves a special place for Orthodoxy, also because of the Greek (and therefore Orthodox) origins of his father Philip. And like his father, Charles is also a fervent ecologist: this inalienable item on his agenda is concealed in the small vial of chrism, made - according to tradition - with sesame, rose, jasmine, cinnamon, neroli, benzoin, amber, and orange blossom, but this time without the two ingredients of animal origin, namely civet and ambergris, derived respectively from civet and sperm whale secretions.

Anointed with the 'vegan' chrism, Charles III can thus accept the crown with a clear conscience at the culmination of a multi-religious ceremony that, while not distorting the substantial and centuries-old elements, will, with a few additions, make Operation Golden Orb (code name of the coronation) acceptably mainstream. It must be acknowledged that the British sovereign has been able to go against the tide on other fronts, for example by doing his utmost in favour of architecture and town planning that respect history, identity and tradition (go and visit the splendid village of Poundbury, built by the architect Leon Krier on Charles' commission). Or **bluntly disparaging** about certain examples of Brutalist architecture, such as the Birmingham Central Library ("a place where books are incinerated, not kept", said the then Prince of Wales). All the more reason: God Save the King - even from political correctness.