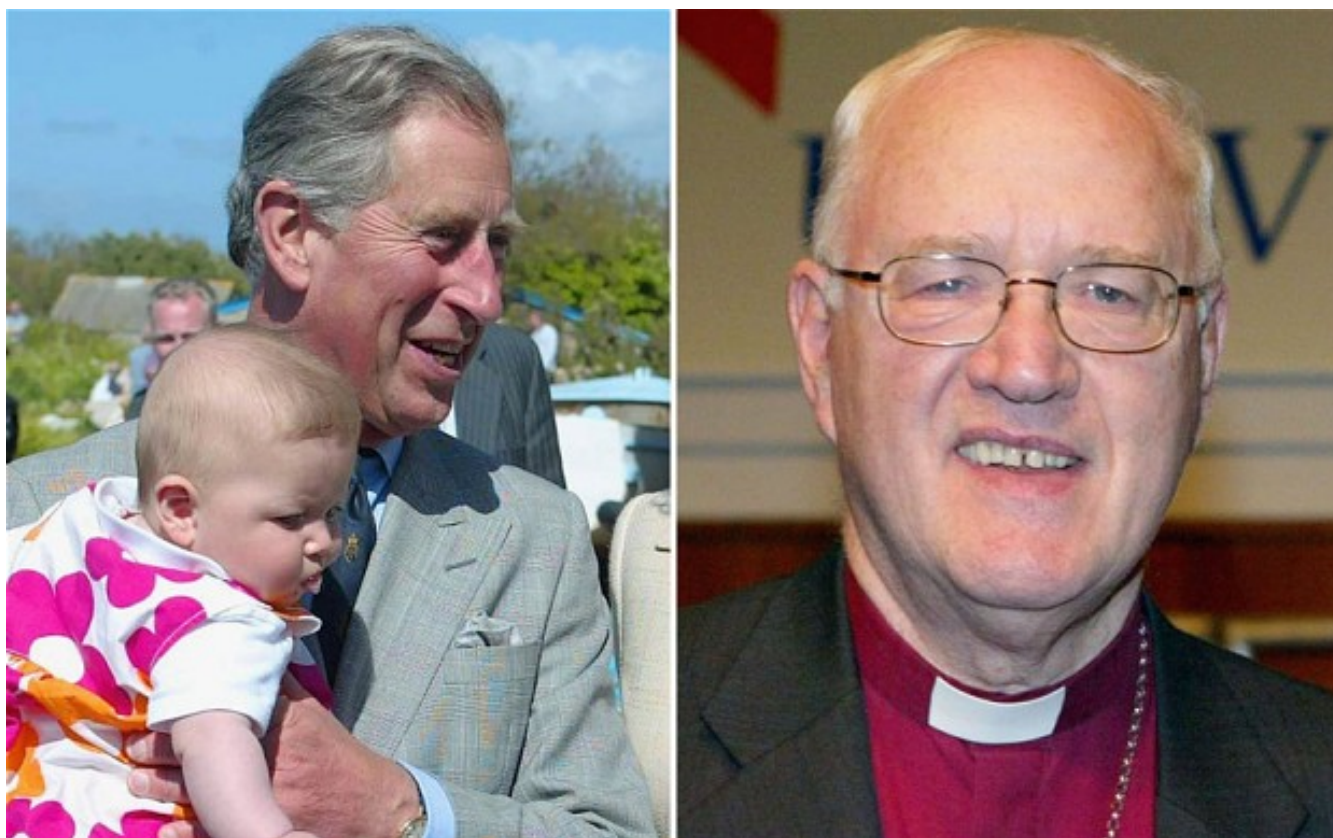


Church of England concerned over royal succession reforms

The Church of England has expressed concerns over proposed changes to the laws governing royal succession only a day after the Prince of Wales reportedly said "rushed" reforms could have "unintended consequences".



Prince Charles and Former Archbishop of Canterbury Lord Carey Photo: Getty Images

Former Archbishop of Canterbury Lord Carey shares the worries of Prince Charles, who is thought to believe that changing the rules which give male heirs priority could throw up difficulties.

He, along with other leading members of the clergy, believe the Prime Minister's plan to remove a ban on an heir to the throne marrying a Roman Catholic could upset a "delicate constitutional balance".

If the planned changes go ahead, it raises the prospect of a future heir being brought up as a Catholic.

This would result in the difficult scenario of the next heir, due to inherit the title of Supreme Governor of the Church of England, being a Catholic and therefore barred from the throne.

They fear the changes will lead to confusion and have been in talks with ministers over the issue, officials at Lambeth Palace said.

A spokesman said senior clergy were "quite concerned" by the proposals and could foresee "a little difficulty down the line".

Lord Carey told the Mail: "The reported concerns of the Prince of Wales need to be listened to very

carefully. We must not have any ill-thought-through proposals because of the potential to upset a delicate constitutional balance.

"The Government's instincts to allow female heirs to succeed are wholly right but to avoid any unintended consequences of the proposals for the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church there must be much greater consultation and discussion."

Officials at Lambeth Palace also pointed to comments made by Dr Rowan Williams, who was the Archbishop of Canterbury until he stepped down last month, about the necessity of any heir to the throne being raised in the Church of England rather than as a Catholic.

Dr Williams said: 'If we're quite clear that, so long as the monarch is Supreme Governor of the Church of England, there needs to be a clear understanding that the heir is brought up in that environment.'

Prince Charles is said to back the principle of changing the law so that if the child of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge is a girl she would become Queen, if it commands popular support.

But he reportedly raised concerns in a private meeting with Richard Heaton, permanent secretary at the Cabinet Office, about what would happen if his grandchild were to be allowed to marry a Roman Catholic, as the Government has proposed.

The prince's concerns could deal a blow to plans to change the royal succession law, after David Cameron struck a deal with the 15 other countries where the Queen is head of state that the rules must be overhauled.

Alice Philips - The Telegraph