

Prince's succession change concerns 'unfounded'



A leading canon lawyer has said the Church will not stand in the way of a Catholic spouse of a future king or queen bringing up their children as Anglicans. Fr James O'Kane, general secretary of the Canon Law Society of Great Britain and Ireland, has said that although Catholic parents would still have the obligation to do everything within their means to bring their children up in their own faith, the Church would be compassionate towards the difficulties they faced in doing so.

His comments follow reports that the Prince of Wales has raised concerns about the constitutional consequences of the Government's plan to amend the 1701 Act of Settlement to permit royal heirs to marry Catholics.

Prince Charles is reported to have expressed concerns during a meeting with a senior civil servant over what would happen to the children of a monarch married to a Catholic given the sovereign's role as Supreme Governor of the Church of England.

The prince is believed to be concerned that canon law requires the children of such a marriage to be brought up as Catholics and was said to be sceptical when told that any constitutional difficulties this creates could be resolved by negotiations with the Holy See, according to the Daily Mail.

But Fr O'Kane said that a Catholic marrying a British king or queen faced a "special set of challenges" in bringing their children up Catholic as they would be expected to be raised as Anglicans and suggested they could take the children to a midweek Catholic Mass or even giving them private Catholic instruction in the royal palace.

The 1983 Code of Canon Law states that a Catholic marrying a non-Catholic must "do all in his or her power in order that all offspring are baptised and brought up in the Catholic Church".

The Government has said that under its proposals, children of a monarch and his or her Catholic spouse could not be brought up in the Catholic faith if they planned to remain heirs to the throne. This week, Nick Clegg, the Deputy Prime Minister, said in the House of Commons that the proposals "will not alter in any way" the relationship between Church and State nor the position of the monarch as head of the Church.

A Church of England spokesman said that it still remains to be seen how the plan to permit Catholics to marry heirs to the throne would work in practice.

Sam Adams - The Tablet