

As the supreme governor of the Church of England, King Charles III is expected to continue his mother's friendship and esteem for the [Roman] Catholic Church, but it will form just part of his broad interest in all Christian denominations, other world religions, and his seeming religious fervor for environmental concerns.

The new monarch, who immediately acceded to the throne following the death of Queen Elizabeth II on Sept. 8 and will be crowned May 6 in Westminster Abbey, has long had close ties with the [Roman] Catholic Church. As heir to the throne, he spent many years supporting Catholic charities, as well as often speaking out on behalf of persecuted Christians, including working with the Catholic charity Aid to the Church in Need.

He welcomed Pope St. John Paul II on his historic visit to Canterbury in 1982 and has made many trips to the Vatican, including meeting in private audience with John Paul II in 1985 and attending his funeral in 2005, meeting Pope Benedict XVI in 2009, and visiting Pope Francis in 2017.

"I know of nothing which would lead me to think that he isn't strongly supportive of the faith and devotional life of his [Roman] Catholic subjects and of Pope Francis," said Anglican Archbishop Ian Ernest, director of the Anglican Centre in Rome.

But how does King Charles understand the [Roman] Catholic faith? Does he recognize the differences between the [Roman] Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion, and how might he influence relations in the future?

Adrian Hilton, editor of the popular Anglican website ArchbishopCranmer.com, also believes Charles is aware of the denominational differences and recalled how, during his visit to John Paul II in 1985 with his then-wife Princess Diana, he had wished to attend Mass with the Pope, upon which the queen intervened. But to Hilton, this suggests "that he sees the Church as one and rather laments divisions within."

"He is clearly aware of sacramental differences and interecclesiastical tensions, but doesn't view them as primary issues of salvation," he said. "That he gifted the Pope [in 1985] a copy of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People also suggests that he views the Church of England as an expression of Catholic continuity."

Does He Relate to Jesus as Lord?

Asked if Charles was perhaps closer to the Greek Orthodox Church, similar to his father, the late Duke of Edinburgh, who was a member of the Greek royal family, Hilton said: "This is difficult, not least because he has manifestly changed his mind on some theological issues over the years — as I guess we all do — so his thinking on Eastern Orthodox Christianity 20 years ago may not

be what it is today.” Still, Hilton said he senses Charles has inherited a “deep respect for Orthodoxy and also the cosmology of Universalism,” and Mount Athos, which Charles has visited several times, “represents to him a cultural history, spiritual unity and interfaith harmony which supersedes the divisions within and between Jerusalem, Rome and Canterbury.”

Hilton said he believes Charles is “relaxed about women priests and bishops” in the Anglican Communion and that they do not “present any sacerdotal or ontological difficulties for him at all.” “Full unity’ is not as important to him as respectful and peaceful coexistence,” he said.

As for whether Charles could conceivably change his denomination, Hilton said the King “is as likely to convert to [Roman] Catholicism as he is to Orthodoxy, which likelihood I would rate as zero. He has sworn to be ‘Defender of the Faith,’ and while Henry VIII might have earned that title in defense of the Catholic Church, Charles III has his feet firmly planted in his mother’s understanding of the established church.”

“He won’t want to go down in history as the monarch who reneged on his coronation oath,” Hilton continued, adding that he will abide by the constitution to give royal assent to parliamentary bills. “He may occasionally do this through gritted teeth, but so did his mother,” he said.

‘Pluralist’ Perspectives

What Charles has clearly embraced is the late queen’s understanding of the “role and key purpose of the Church of England in a pluralist context,” Hilton said. This openness to treating all religions the same was clearly visible in a speech Charles gave just days after his accession to the throne.

Speaking to more than 30 religious leaders, including Cardinal Vincent Nichols of Westminster, on Sept. 16, the king stressed the importance of respecting “those who follow other spiritual paths” as well as secular ones, adding and that he believed he had a personal “duty to protect” the country’s diversity, which he sees as “enjoined by my own faith.”

“I am a committed Anglican Christian, and at my coronation, I will take an oath relating to the settlement of the Church of England,” Charles said, but added he was also committed to promoting “freedom of conscience, generosity of spirit and care for others, which are, to me, the essence of our nationhood.”

Environmental Views

But even clearer than his commitment to pluralism and religious freedom is the king’s passionate concern for the environment which, Ashenden said, is closer to Charles’ heart than any other particular denomination or creed.

As Prince Charles, he frequently backed globalist environmental projects, and in 2020, he lent his support to the World Economic Forum’s controversial “Great Reset” initiative — a global

and secular “one-world” utopian vision aimed at rebuilding societies after the COVID-19 pandemic based on greater solidarity and a more sustainable economy. Within that same forum, he called for a “Marshall Plan to save the environment,” which, he predicted, will cost “trillions, not billions, of dollars.”

Hilton said he believes Charles’ environmental views are coherent with Christianity, along the lines of St. Francis of Assisi, and focus on safeguarding creation for future generations rather than the “worship of Gaia.” But given his long record of passionate involvement, the king is likely to find it hard to suppress his views in this area in accordance with the neutral nature of the monarchy.

Environmental dogmas aside, Ernest, the Anglican archbishop, was confident that when it comes to [Roman] Catholic-Anglican dialogue, there would be a “growth in friendship and mutual trust” during King Charles’ monarchy. But any direct, hands-on influence in that area is unlikely, he predicted, given that the monarch’s role as supreme governor “does not involve management or oversight of the policy of the Church of England and of the Anglican Communion and does not concern doctrine and order as such, but is a constitutional position which safeguards the constitutional standing of the Church of England.”

“His Majesty is a strong defender of the traditional faith and worship of the Church of England and, like his mother, is patron of the Prayer Book Society [the society that promotes the traditional, 1662 liturgical order of the Church of England],” Ernest said. The king, he added, “has already put on record his determination to follow his mother in his performance of his duty under the inspiration of God.”