

## THE NEXT CORONATION

### Thoughts towards a policy for Humanists UK

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At her Coronation, after the Queen had been anointed with holy Oil after the manner that Solomon was anointed king by Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet, the Dean of Westminster took the golden Spurs of chivalry from the altar and gave them to the Lord Great Chamberlain to present to the Queen, who sent them back to the altar. The Marquess of Salisbury, who had been carrying the Sword of State, then gave it to the Lord Chamberlain to be deposited in the chapel of St Edward the Confessor and received in return another sword in a jewelled scabbard. The Marquess gave it to the Archbishop of Canterbury who laid it on the altar and offered a prayer before presenting it, with the assistance of the Bishops of London and Winchester, to the Queen. The Queen took it, went herself to the altar and laid it there. The Marquess then offered the Dean of Westminster 100 silver shillings to redeem the sword, which the Dean accepted, and the Marquess then took the sword, unsheathed it and carried it in front of the Queen for the rest of the ceremony. Next, the Dean of Westminster took the Armills (bracelets) of Sincerity and Wisdom from the altar and gave them to the Archbishop, who placed them on the Queen's wrists . . .

This summary of a few minutes from the three-hour Coronation service in Westminster Abbey in 1953 makes it clear that the occasion was one of high theatre (indeed, the crossing in the Abbey where it took place was termed 'the theatre'), mixing mediaeval chivalry and myth with Christian prayers and a communion service. On television each move was reverently described in hushed tones by the BBC's Richard Dimbleby.

The succession of the Prince of Wales to the throne comes daily closer and is likely to occur within the next decade. Preparations need to be made for it. Humanists UK is committed to secularism: we seek a plural, open society where state institutions are separate from religion. In 1953 few questioned the entanglement of the Church of England with the State and with Winston Churchill back in Downing Street after the radical changes of the Attlee government people were ready for a coronation based on assertion of the allegedly ancient roots of royal ceremony. Moreover, people were almost universally religious, with the default position of the indifferent being 'Church of England'. Now, however, as the first quarter of the 21st century nears its end, over half the population owns to no religion and the royal family, though still popular, is regarded with more critical and less reverent<sup>1</sup> eyes than it was six decades ago. What are the implications of this for the new reign?

Realistically it has first to be accepted that the battle for disestablishment is still barely joined, let alone won. The law dictates that the new King must swear to three oaths: one, immediately on accession, to uphold the rights of the church of Scotland, one to uphold the

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<sup>1</sup>

Television was required to cut away from the Anointing and was allowed no close-up shots.

Protestant succession in England and Wales, and at the Coronation a lengthy one that includes maintaining the rights, privileges and doctrines of the Church of England. A report<sup>2</sup> from the Constitution Unit of University College, London has, however, drawn attention to the incompatibility of the sentiments and language of the oaths with today's boasted "British values" of tolerance, equality and freedom of belief. It proposes that at the least each should be introduced with a preamble that places it in its historical context, but it states a preference that while there is still time alternative wordings of each oath be introduced by legislation. In each case it suggests either more or less radical amendment, and in each case what it calls its 'maxi change' would generalise the oath so as to emphasise the Sovereign's duty to all his territories with their various constitutional arrangements and all his people, endorsing their freedom of religion and belief. These 'maxi changes' would have been much preferable to the several statutory Oaths since they would produce a modern formulation of the duties of the Sovereign in keeping with human rights and freedoms. They would also have aligned well with the Prince of Wales' known wish to broaden the application of the title 'Defender of the Faith'<sup>3</sup>. However, events have overtaken us, although there is still time for a revision of the Coronation oath itself.

What, however, of the Coronation itself? A repeat of the 1953 procession<sup>4</sup> is impossible: it was three miles long and took three-quarters of an hour to pass any one spot. Twenty-four military bands and over 44,000 troops were involved, marching twelve abreast in the procession or lining the route. Foreign royalty and the diplomatic corps, the Commonwealth and colonies played a significant part.<sup>5</sup> A 21st century coronation will inevitably be on a smaller scale proportioned to Britain's reduced role and pretensions.

But the word 'coronation' refers not to the accompanying show but to the ceremonial of crowning the king. While few would wish the exact model from 1953 to be repeated in our very changed circumstances, it seems inevitable that the continuing entanglement of the State and the established Church will entail an Anglican communion service.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, tradition is close to Britain's heart, ceremonial is among our national talents, and tourism turns both to high profit. It must be certain, therefore, that the Crown jewels and regalia (spurs, armills and all) play some part, even if room is not found for the Gentlemen Ushers of all the Rods - Purple, Blue, Scarlet, Silver, Gold and Green as well as the more familiar Black - and even if the number of pages dressed like playing cards and following in the footsteps of peers carrying their coronets on velvet cushions is reduced.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Professor Robert Hazell and Dr Bon Morris: [Swearing in the New King: The Accession Declaration and Coronation Oaths](#), UCL Constitution Unit, May 2018, hereinafter referred to as 'the first UCL report'.

<sup>3</sup> The title was given by the Pope to Henry VIII before his split with Rome but maintained by him and his successors as a commitment to the Anglican faith.

<sup>4</sup> See the list at <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/40020/supplement/6223>

<sup>5</sup> See Bob Morris: [Inaugurating a New Reign: Planning for Accession and Coronation](#), UCL Constitution Unit, May 2018, hereinafter referred to as 'the second UCL report'.

<sup>6</sup> This is true despite the fact that no other European royal family retains a religious coronation ceremony - see the second UCL report at 4.1.

<sup>7</sup> See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_participants\\_in\\_the\\_coronation\\_procession\\_of\\_Elizabeth\\_II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_participants_in_the_coronation_procession_of_Elizabeth_II)

However, the continuation of a Church of England communion service does not mean that this has to be at the centre of the entire coronation celebrations. Indeed, it would be contrary to the deeply held values of the British state in the 21st century to put the focus on mediaeval courtly display and elaborate religious rituals. Republicanism has its supporters but the great majority of the new King's subjects - more acceptably, of citizens of the United Kingdom of which he will be the titular head of state - accept the role of the Sovereign and the royal family - and they need therefore to be brought into account in the celebrations at the start of the new reign.

There are two paradigms to consider here: first, the spectrum of religion or belief, and second, the representative institutions of civil society.

To deal first with the latter, one should note that even in 1953 the 8,251 guests<sup>8</sup> in the Abbey included (for example) trade unionists, Parliamentarians<sup>9</sup> and representatives of local authorities as well as foreign royalty and diplomats and senior forces officers. But their role was entirely passive: the secular actors in the ceremony were the peerage, orders of chivalry, heralds and kings of arms. These may next time have a much reduced role in the Abbey but it is there, in its mediaeval splendour, that they belong, along with the Crown jewels and regalia. Today's secular movers and shakers need to be given a role in another 'theatre'. These should include not only holders of elected office but also representatives of industry, the professions and trade unions, of the major scientific and cultural institutions, and of charities and voluntary organisations - many of which already enjoy royal patronage.

Similarly, in 1953 the religious spectrum extended no further than the principal Protestant denominations, with the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland assigned a bit part in the proceedings. Today, either in the Abbey or elsewhere, it is not only the full range of Christian denominations (obviously including the Roman Catholics) and of non-Christian religions that need to find a place but also representatives of organised non-religious beliefs, most obviously of Humanists UK which plays a small but increasingly significant role in the life of the nation.

How should this be arranged? No doubt the congregation in the Abbey - many fewer, surely, than in 1953, when the building was taken over for ten months of preparations that included erecting multiple high tiers of temporary seating throughout - will include a wide range of representative guests, and maybe the Church of England will wish to extend some ecumenical role to some of the religious dignitaries among them, but the Abbey service is at its heart ineluctably an Anglican service of holy communion.

Another solution is needed, and here (as is pointed out in the second UCL report cited above) history points the way. Until George IV's coronation in 1821 the Abbey service was preceded by a great ceremonial gathering in Westminster Hall. The assembled company

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.royal.uk/50-facts-about-queens-coronation-0>

<sup>9</sup> These included the Speaker of the House of Commons but it was considered a step too far to allow him, a commoner, to join the peerage in pledging loyalty to the Queen.

then processed across the road to the Abbey for the Coronation service.

The next Coronation should revive this tradition<sup>10</sup>, forgotten for a mere two centuries in our nation's long story, but the gathering in Westminster Hall should become the secular and civic focus of the day, rather than a convenient place for all to assemble before going to the Abbey. It should be followed by a religious ceremony of much less than 1953's three hours, playing a reduced role in the day's events commensurate with the reduced role of religion in the life of the nation today. If (unlikely as it now seems) as part of the renovation of the Palace of Westminster Westminster Hall is not available, then an alternative venue could be very satisfactory: a temporary building (an alluring subject for an architectural competition?) in one of the Royal Parks, for example.

What should be the elements of such a secular ceremony? There are three essentials in our view. First, those present should be widely acknowledged as representative of the whole community, in its official, professional and occupational roles and in its vast array of voluntary assemblies.<sup>11</sup> Rather than as adjuncts to the Anglican service in the Abbey, the representatives of non-Christian religions and of non-religious beliefs might well prefer to take a part in this secular occasion.

Second, there must be spectacle and performance: think, on a much smaller scale, of Danny Boyle's opening ceremony for the Olympics. Music and performance should find their place in the celebrations, again of a widely representative rather than an élite nature.

Thirdly, at the heart of the occasion, there must be a loyal acknowledgement of the new Sovereign by the assembled company: lessons might be learned from elements of the 1953 Abbey ceremony with orchestrated shouts of Long Live the King and the like. This should be coupled with pledges by the King to fulfil his role as protector of the rights of his people - which might best be done by using here the wording suggested by the first UCL report for the 'maxi change' to the Coronation oath, leaving the present or a less amended version for use in the Abbey.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> But not the banquet back in Westminster Hall after the coronation service .

<sup>11</sup> As suggested in the second UCL report, among such bodies might be the so-called Privileged Bodies (Parliament, some local authorities, universities, institutions and religious organisations) that are entitled on suitable occasions to present a Loyal Address to the Sovereign which is subsequently published in the London Gazette, but the scope at the Coronation ceremony should be much wider.

<sup>12</sup> That wording is:  
Will you solemnly promise and swear to ensure to the best of your ability that the Peoples of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, of the Commonwealth countries where you are monarch, and of your Possessions and other Territories are governed according to their respective laws and customs?  
*I solemnly promise so to do.*  
Will you in all your words and deeds uphold justice, mercy, fairness, equality, understanding and respect for all your Peoples, from all their different races, religions and cultures?  
*I will.*  
Will you to your power maintain tolerance and freedom, including religious tolerance, and will you seek to uphold the rights of all your Peoples to observe their different religions and beliefs, without fear of persecution?  
*All this I promise to do.*

The day might therefore take the following shape:

Morning: Procession from the Palace to Westminster Hall  
Secular ceremony of acclamation of the new King and his pledges to his  
People

Recess for lunch

Afternoon: Procession (on foot under canopies?) to the Abbey  
Church of England service of coronation and oath by the King in relation to  
his role as Supreme Governor  
Procession to the Palace.

Such arrangements would be altogether more fitting for today's society and could mark a renewal of the British genius for ceremony much preferable to the flummery of an artificial revival of mediaeval chivalric tradition.

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### **A flavour of the 1953 Coronation in Westminster Abbey**

Procession started with 28 church dignitaries, including the free churches but not the RCs;  
 then 6 heralds: Fitzalan Pursuivant Extraordinary, Portcullis Pursuivant of Arms, Rouge  
     Dragon Pursuivant of Arms, Kintyre Pursuivant of Arms, Unicorn Pursuivant of Arms,  
     Carrick Pursuivant of Arms,  
 then to represent the Orders of Knighthood the Gentlemen Ushers of the Purple Rod, the  
     Blue Rod, the Scarlet Rod and the Green Rod, assorted Kings of Arms, prelates and  
     chaplains and other officers of the various orders of chivalry  
 then three more heralds  
 then the bearers of standards from the Commonwealth countries, from Wales, and various  
     Royal Standards, all carried by various nobles, each followed by a page carrying his  
     coronet  
 then various officers of the Queen's Household - vice-chamberlain, treasurer, comptroller,  
     and the Keeper of the Jewel House with the Sovereign Ring, the jewelled Sword and  
     the Armills (bracelets) of Sincerity and of Wisdom  
 Bluemantle Pursuivant of Arms and Rouge Croix Pursuivant of Arms  
 Four Knights of the Garter, each with a page carrying his coronet  
 the Lord High Chamberlain of the Household, the Lord Steward of the Household, the Lord  
     Privy Seal  
 the Prime Ministers of the Commonwealth and of the UK  
 The Cross of York and the Archbishop of York and attendant  
 The Lord High Chancellor and pursebearer and page  
 The Cross of Canterbury and the Archbishop of Canterbury and two attendants  
 Five heralds, the Harbinger of the Gentlemen at Arms, and the Standard Bearer  
 The Duke of Edinburgh and his page  
 Three gentlemen at arms and two serjeants at arms  
 Four heralds  
 Dignitaries, each with a page, carrying items of the Regalia - the sceptre with the cross, two  
     Golden Spurs, St Edward's staff, the Sword of Temporal Justice, the Sword of  
     Spiritual Justice, and the Curtana or Sword of Mercy  
 Ulster King of Arms, Clarenceux King of Arms, the Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod,  
     Garter Principal King of Arms  
 The Lord Mayor of London carrying the Crystal Sceptre  
 The Lord Great Chamberlain  
 The High Constable of Scotland  
 The Lord High Steward of Ireland  
 The Great Steward of Scotland  
 The Earl Marshal  
 The Sword of State carried by the Marquess of Salisbury  
 The Lord High Constable of England  
 The Sceptre with the Dove, St Edward's Crown, the Orb, the Paten, the Bible and the  
     Chalice - each carried by a dignitary attended by one or two pages  
 The Clerk of the Cheque and Adjutant, and the Bishop of Bath and Wells  
 The Queen

Trainbearers - the Mistress of the Robes plus page and six Maids of Honour  
The Bishop of Durham and the Lieutenant  
The Groom of the Robes  
Two Ladies and four Women of the Bedchamber  
The Vice-Admiral of the UK  
The Master of the Horse  
Gold Stick in Waiting  
The Captain General of the Queen's Bodyguard for Scotland  
The Captain of the Queen's Bodyguard (Yeomen of the Guard)  
The Rear-Admiral of the UK  
The Keeper of the Privy Purse  
The Queen's Private Secretary and Equerries and several other office holders including  
Silver Stick in Waiting

The Regalia are placed on the altar piece by piece.

The Queen is presented by the Archbishop of Canterbury to the four points of the compass

The Queen takes the Coronation Oath, administered by the Archbishop of Canterbury, then goes to the altar with two bishops to swear the oath on the bible

The Queen signs a parchment copy of her Oath.

The Archbishop of Canterbury and Moderator of the Church of Scotland present her with the bible on which she swore 'to keep your Majesty ever mindful of the law and the gospel of God ... here is wisdom, this is the royal law'

The Bible is placed back on the altar

Hymns, anthems, readings and prayers.

'Zadok the Priest' during which the Queen is divested of her jewels and robes, dons a simple white robe (the colobium sindonis), proceeds to the throne and (under a canopy borne by four knights of the garter) is anointed with holy oil by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

The Queen is presented with and dons a cloth of gold cloak and sits on the throne.

She is presented piece by piece with the Regalia, starting with the Dean of Westminster who presents the Golden Spurs to the Lord Great Chamberlain, who presents them to the Queen, who sends them back to the altar.

The Sword of State is handed to the Lord Chamberlain (who sends it to St Edward's Chapel) and its bearer receives in return another (jewelled) sword in a scabbard; he presents it to the Archbishop of Canterbury who places it on the altar and prays.

The Archbishop of Canterbury then takes the Sword and with the Archbishop of York and the Bishops of London and Winchester presents it to the Queen.

The Queen takes it and goes to the altar and causes it to be laid there, returning to her throne.

The original bearer of the Sword (Lord Salisbury) goes to the altar and exchanges it for one hundred shillings which he gives to the Dean of Westminster. He then draws the Sword and carries it in front of the Queen for the rest of the ceremony.

The Queen is then in turn presented with the Armills, the Orb, the Ring, the Sceptre, the Rod with the Dove, each with comparable ceremony.

The ABC crowns the Queen.

Acclamation.

Benediction.

Enthroning.

Homage, by ABC, by royal dukes, other dukes, marquesses, earls, viscounts, barons, mainly represented by the senior peer of each degree (“I, ..., do become your liege man of life and limb, and of earthly worship; and faith and truth I will bear unto you, to live and die, against all manner of folks. So help me God.”)

Communion. Prayers. Exhortation. General confession. Absolution. ABC prayers. Prayer of Humble Access. Prayer of Consecration. Extended prayers and hymns.

Te Deum.

Recess - Queen retires, and later re-emerges for Procession out of the Abbey.