

The Right To Wear White: What If A Catholic Could Succeed?

Contributed by Dr. Janice Seto
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Gordon Brown recently enjoyed his first official weekend stay as British Prime Minister as the guest of the Queen in Scotland. But there's one topic of conversation which was likely off the agenda over the dinner table: that relating to the ban on members of the Royal Family marrying a Catholic whilst retaining their position in the line of succession.

As the Windsors prepare for another royal wedding with the marriage of Peter Phillips and his Canadian girlfriend, Autumn Kelly, Dr. Janice Seto examines the issue which continues to perplex many within the Catholic Church, Parliament and even society at large...

With the upcoming marriage of Peter Phillips to his Canadian older woman, Autumn Kelly - an Irish Catholic from Montreal - the Act of Succession once again comes into force.

In recent months we've seen more public debate about what is essentially a ban on members of the Royal Family marrying a Catholic partner whilst retaining their place in the line of succession.

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown has not deemed this a priority issue so let us indulge in a purely academic parlour game.

What if
Catholic Succession were allowed?

For starters, the dressmakers would need to make a new dress for the Vatican City, for Catholic Queens have the right to wear white (Privilege du blanc) during audiences with the Holy Father, whereas all other ladies should wear black. (Not for the first time in her life, Tony Blair's wife, practicing Catholic Cherie, broke protocol by wearing white during her meeting with Pope Benedict XVI in 2006).

More seriously, though, there would be a need to update the line of succession to include, for instance, the names of the Kent boys, the sons and grandchildren of the present Duke and Duchess of Kent (Edward and Katherine).

At present, the couple's only Protestant descendants are borne of the union of their daughter, Lady Helen Taylor (left) and her art gallery husband, Tim Taylor.

And what about Prince Michael of Kent, whose children Lord Frederick and Lady Gabriella were born Protestant?

Before this summer's engagement of the Queen's grandson, Peter Phillips, about whom it's yet to be announced that he'll be forced to renounce his position in the line of succession, Prince Michael was perhaps the most high profile member of the Royal Family to do exactly this upon his marriage to the elegant Marie-Christine in 1978.

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[includes/jumies/rectanglew.php]}But while this takes care of the Windsors, what if we went back further, to a time long before even the reign of Victoria & Albert?

Even if previous generations of royal figures had not found themselves negated from the line of succession due to marriage, the modern-day Windsors would find themselves relegated: there would be no Queen Elizabeth II or, in the years ahead, King Charles (and possibly 'Queen Camilla'), nor would there be a King William V.

Keep in mind that the Windsors come to the throne from a circuitous Protestant lineage.

In reality, the most credible rival to their hold on the British monarchy are the Catholic descendants of the Jacobean.

How far back do we go?

The answer: to over 300 years and the Glorious Revolution during which James II and his male heir were deposed.

THE WINDSORS v. THE JACOBEANS (Stuarts)

A quick history lesson from 1688, during which time there was a politically-based coup by the political classes against an unpopular Stuart king.

Historians agree that James II was almost as intransigent as his father, the beheaded Charles I, and nowhere near as deft as his late brother, Charles II, when it came to his role as sovereign.

James II as Duke of York had enjoyed some degree of respect and popularity, thanks in part to the fact his first wife, Lady Anne Hyde, was born an earl's daughter.

These valuable commodities - which once gone are very hard to retrieve

- were lost when, at the age of 40, James contracted marriage at age with the 15-year-old Catholic Italian, Maria di Modena (Mary of Modena).

Still, as long as he and Mary of Modena failed to give birth to a healthy child, the people were assured that James would be succeeded by his adult Protestant daughters: Princess Mary, the consort of William of Orange, and Princess Anne, whose husband was Prince George of Denmark.

But tragedy was to strike at the very heart of the Royal Family. In 1688, after giving birth to five sickly children who died young, resulting in no living heir - and five years after Mary of Modena's last pregnant - a healthy son was at last born.

James, Prince of Wales, duly displaced his half-sisters, Mary and Anne, in the line of succession.

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[includes/jumies/rectanglew.php]}Rumours circulated in the country about the conception and birth of the miracle male heir after so many sickly births.

This wonderment was fanned into skepticism, casting doubt on the likelihood of the event occurring without intervention. Questions were asked throughout society: 'Perhaps Mary of Modena had given birth to another stillborn – and perhaps they had a substitute ready and waiting in a warming pan?'

The resultant warming-pan scandal saw James II and family flee England forever in the middle of the night to Paris, whereupon they sought refuge with King Louis XIV, prior to the arrival of 26-year-old Protestant daughter Mary and her husband, William, from the Netherlands to the British throne.

True or not, the scandal worked to get rid of James. And centuries later, it is a moot point.

Was it unlawful for the Beaufort descendants of John of Gaunt and Katherine Swynford to stake claims to the throne when the succession laws of Henry IV forbade such an act?

Was Anne Boleyn fairly tried and condemned for incest with her brother?

And jumping to the present day, should Paul Burrell have ever been put through the stress of a trial?

These are all examples, spanning the centuries, of truth not being the determining factor in political matters.

The story of James II could be deemed to be little more than a footnote in history.

All of his legitimate adult descendants – Mary, Anne, James, and a Princess Louise born in Paris – left no living legitimate issue or descendants. As such, the line of succession would have bypassed him anyway, as would have been the case with King Henry VIII.

We therefore have to go back a generation of Jacobean to find a Catholic line with legitimate descendants.

Mary Queen of Scots' only child, King James I of England and VI of Scotland, fortunately sired fecund children, including Charles I.

In the same way that Parliament had to search back through James I's lineage for a Protestant heir, we have to tap the same tree to find the Catholic with the highest claim.

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[includes/jumies/rectanglew.php]}For a Protestant heir, genealogists were forced to return to the lineage of the eldest sister of Charles I, Princess Elizabeth, (known fondly as the Winter Queen of Bohemia through marriage with the German Palatine and titular king of Bohemia). Their castle in Heidelberg, the ruins of which continue to attract tourists to this day, was trashed by Louis XIV.

From this union came the Hanoverian Georges.

The oldest Catholic line comes from the daughter of James I's eldest surviving son, Charles I and his wife, Princess Henrietta-Maria of France, daughter of Le Roi Galante, Henri IV himself, and his wife, Maria di Medici.

In other words, when the line of James II came to an end with the Young Pretender Bonnie Prince Charlie and his brother, Henry, Cardinal of York, the Catholic Stuart claim fell to the line of James II's sister, Princess Henrietta-Anne.

This pretty Stuart princess was married at the age of seventeen to her French cousin Philippe, Duke d'Orleans, brother of Louis XIV of France, and whose line is carefully documented by Jacobean supporters.

Today their strongest claimant is represented by the Bavarian royals.

The head of the family is Duke Franz, his heir is his brother, Duke Max, who like Mr Bennet, has five daughters.

The Wittelsbach duchesses are lovely, one of whom, Marie-Caroline, is married to a duke, Philip of Wurtemberg. It is from this family that Queen Mary hailed through a morganatic line.

Many of the Wittelsbach women have made their mark on history, the most famous being Sissi, Empress Elisabeth of Austria.

Philip's eldest daughter is the lively and educated Sophie, now HRH the Hereditary Princess of Liechtenstein. In time, perhaps when her husband Prince Alois succeeds his father Hans Adam as sovereign prince, Sophie as consort of Liechtenstein will also be the chief Catholic claimant to the UK....now that would be quite a State Visit to Britain!

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[includes/jumies/rectanglew.php]}Gordon
Brown is right to be cautious in refusing to ignite fresh debate about the ban on members of the Royal Family marrying Catholics whilst retaining their claim, however distant, to the throne.

If the Act of Succession were ever repudiated, with the Windsors possibly becoming unpopular with their drunken antics or questionable taste in marriage partners, there could well be a clamour to say goodbye to the relatively modern family 'The Windsors', to replace them instead with an heir with a very strong historical claim.

Amid newspaper headlines and debate about the worthiness of one family over another, the Jacobean dynasty would occupy Buckingham Palace – Sophie already has four photogenic children ready to wave to the crowds from the balcony. She is dazzling and dignified in white.

You may ask why these Stuarts are called the Jacobeans?

That is a Latin term for James!

Further reading:

LINK: [The Royal Stuart Society](#)

LINK: [The Jacobite Kings & Their Heirs](#)