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King Charles III Is Crowned in Lavish Coronation Ceremony

Coronation mixes 1,000 years of tradition with modern touches to keep monarchy relevant

By *Max Colchester* [Follow](#)

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LONDON—King Charles III was crowned by the archbishop of Canterbury in Westminster Abbey, marking the new Carolean era with a star-studded guest list, thousands of marching soldiers and a ceremony that both celebrates a millennium of history and reflects a more modern, diverse Britain.

The king, after holding a jewel-encrusted orb that represents the world under Christ and a scepter depicting earthly power, had the solid gold St. Edward's Crown placed on his head by the archbishop. A cry of "God save the king" went up, a fanfare sounded, abbey bells rang and gun salutes boomed across the nation and beyond.

Outside Westminster Abbey, packed crowds who braced the slate skies and light rain cheered the first coronation witnessed in Britain for 70 years, a ceremony watched by millions across the world.

The moment marked the pinnacle of a religious and constitutional ceremony whose history in Britain traces back to the 10th century and is now a rarity among monarchies. Charles acceded to the throne the moment his mother, Queen Elizabeth II, died last year. Saturday's ceremony instead marks a compact: The church blessed the monarch, and in return the king made an oath to defend the Protestant church and rule his people with mercy, while adding a prayer for every faith.

"In his name and after his example I come not to be served but to serve," said King Charles as the ceremony started.

For the new king, the lavish ceremony marked the latest iteration of the House of Windsor franchise, which is having to adapt to a nation that has far less deference to the monarchy or religion than in the past, yet is still broadly supportive of the monarchy as an institution. One of the key parts of the service, in which the archbishop would have invited

people at home to swear allegiance to the king, was toned down following criticism that it was out of step with the times.

For Charles, it was also the end of a 70-year wait to be crowned, the longest such period in British history.



King Charles III walks in the Coronation Procession at Westminster Abbey. PHOTO: WPA POOL/GETTY IMAGES

Queen Camilla leaves Westminster Abbey following the coronation ceremony. PHOTO: WPA POOL/GETTY IMAGES

Outside in the light rain, crowds gathered to witness the rare moment projected onto giant screens. There was a festive atmosphere in the air. Many in the crowd donned fake crowns,

and wore red-white-and-blue suits and cutout faces of the newly crowned king. After the coronation, tens of thousands filled The Mall in front of Buckingham Palace to watch the royal family, including Charles and Camilla wearing their crowns, emerge on the palace balcony to wild cheers. A flyover of military aircraft led to fresh cheers and the singing of the national anthem, “God Save the King.”

After a long day, during which Charles looked somber, he broke into smiles as we waved back at the crowd.

Richard Don, a retired lawyer, had traveled to London from Kent, southeastern England, with his wife, Penny. Mr. Don said he remembered traveling to London for the funeral of Winston Churchill as a child in 1965, and wanted to witness history again.

“We haven’t had a coronation for 70 years and I don’t suppose there will be another one in my lifetime,” said Mr. Don, who added that he admires the monarchy as an institution that has brought stability for centuries. “It’s not so much needing to admire the person on the throne, it’s a respect for the institution.”

Buckingham Palace attempted to meld tradition with inclusivity. The king for the first time prayed publicly for “a blessing to all...of every faith and belief.” For the first time, non-Christian religions played visible roles, with people from Jewish, Sikh and other faiths participating in the entry procession and presenting regalia to the king before his crowning.

In a nod to the Catholic Church, the procession also featured a cross containing splinters of the true cross donated by the Vatican. The 2,300-strong cast of guests in Westminster Abbey was also varied, with local charity workers sitting near around 100 heads of state and representatives of scores of other nations, including U.S. first lady Jill Biden and pop stars including Lionel Richie and Nick Cave.

But the service was heavily imbued with history and martial tradition. The king and Queen Camilla processed from Buckingham Palace to the abbey by horse and coach, along with hundreds of soldiers. After entering the Great West Door of the abbey, which has seen nearly every British monarch crowned since 1066, the king, dressed in a velvet robe, made an oath on the bible to govern the people with justice and uphold the Anglican Church. “Service is love in action,” the archbishop of Canterbury told the congregation.

The monarch later sat on the wooden 12th-century Coronation Chair, which in turn was placed on the elaborately mosaicked Cosmati Pavement in the center of the abbey, which symbolizes the cosmos on the day of judgment. Shielded by a screen as Handel’s “Zadok the Priest” played, he was anointed by the archbishop, who poured blessed oil from a flask

shaped like a golden eagle onto a 12th-century silver gilt coronation spoon and blessed the monarch in the form of a cross on his head, breast and hand to mark God's descent on the ruler.

Then, dressed in white linen Colobium Sindonis robe and the gilded flowing supertunica, the rheumy-eyed king was presented with regalia including gold spurs, which represent knightly chivalry, and a ring to represent the marriage between the king and his people. For the first and only time, the weighty St. Edward's Crown, was placed on his head.

The king then received homage from the archbishop and his heir William, Prince of Wales, who kissed him on the cheek in a show of fealty. The public was invited along with the congregation to pledge their allegiance by repeating the words, "I swear that I will pay true allegiance to Your Majesty, and to your heirs and successors according to law. So help me God." Later, the congregation was asked to proclaim, "May the king live forever." Queen Camilla was also anointed by the archbishop and a crown placed atop her head.



Members of Britain's royal family in attendance at the coronation. PHOTO: YUI MOK/ZUMA PRESS



Prince Harry leaves Westminster Abbey following the ceremony. PHOTO: WPA POOL/GETTY IMAGES

But in the buildup to the event, interest in the coronation, which is paid for by taxpayers, was lukewarm, according to polls. Some 35% of respondents to a recent YouGov poll said they cared “not very much” about the event, compared with 24% who cared “a fair amount.” The nation was granted an extra day’s vacation to mark the event and pubs are allowed to stay open until 1 a.m., two hours later than normal.

In a country where now only some 45% of people identify as Christian, a service built around an oath to protect the Protestant faith seems out of touch to some, said Anna Whitelock, professor of the history of monarchy at City, University of London.

“I think it is the medieval and the modern coming together,” she said. “It is a discordant clash.”

Roughly a quarter of Britons want an elected head of state rather than a monarch, polls show. However, police said they would take a low-tolerance approach to any disruptions on Saturday. Early in the day, Graham Smith, the head of the U.K.’s biggest antimonarchist movement, was arrested in Trafalgar Square for bringing a megaphone with him as he rallied hundreds of people, according to his group, Republic.



The ceremony offered an opportunity for a Windsor family reunion. Prince Harry, who has spent most of Charles’s short reign launching scathing critiques of the monarch from California, was present but relegated to sit with minor members of the family. His wife, Meghan Markle, didn’t wish to attend. The king’s disgraced brother, Prince Andrew, banished from royal duties after settling allegations of sexual abuse, was also present.

There were some nods to modernity but any notion that the ceremony would be toned down for cost reasons was dispelled. The event then featured the largest military parade seen in London since Queen Elizabeth's coronation in 1953. Some 4,000 soldiers processed along with the Gold State Coach to travel back to Buckingham Palace, forming a mile-long column.

Thousands of flag-waving onlookers cheered the procession. The soldiers formed up in the garden at Buckingham Palace, where they sang the national anthem and cheered "Hip! Hip! Hooray!" to the king.

King Charles and Queen Camilla wave to the crowds from the balcony of Buckingham Palace alongside other members of the royal family. PHOTO: PETR DAVID JOSEK/ASSOCIATED PRESS

The Royal Air Force's Red Arrows fly over The Mall and Buckingham Palace. PHOTO: ANDREEA ALEXANDRU/ASSOCIATED PRESS

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