

'Defender of Faiths' ?

1. For historical reasons, the British monarch finds her/himself as '**Defender of the [Christian] Faith**'.

2. Folk will have varying views on the appropriateness, or otherwise, of this in a multi-racial and multi-faith society. Prince Charles's personal solution seems to veer towards rewording the title: 'Defender of the Faiths'. But can 'Faiths' be defended by one person? This needs to be put into focus, for there is an important difference between **people of faith** and **the faiths they hold**.

3. **People of Faith**. The right of people to worship in freedom is something that is very precious, and worth striving to maintain – for those of *every* faith. (Not merely out of Christian self-preservation!)

4. **The Faiths they hold**. We cannot, however, really defend beliefs contrary to those that we hold. For example: I cannot defend both all the beliefs of Christianity *and* all those of Judaism because they contradict each other over the person of Jesus Christ. (Neither you, nor I, nor the Monarch can defend one faith which claims that Jesus is Lord, and also defend another faith which categorically denies it. We must maintain what the Chief Rabbi terms – *The Dignity of Difference*.)

5. We cannot, therefore, be Defenders of **Faiths**. What we can be is defenders of the rights of religious freedom to those of other faiths. That's a very *different* thing.

6. Prince Charles's use of a title 'Defender of Faiths' fogs the issue. His future roles might better be described as

i) **Defending the Christian Faith**, and

ii) **Championing religious respect and the cause of religious freedom**.

The two are not the same. The second arises from the first.

7. Come to think of it, that's our double-calling as well!