NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

British bishops resist move to allow monarch to marry a Catholic

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Canterbury, England

A royal row has broken out between Church of England bishops and Prime Minister David Cameron's liberal-minded coalition government over a planned bill to change ancient laws governing the royal line of succession.

The government wants to pass the proposed Succession to the Crown Bill in time for the birth of a baby to Prince William and his wife, Kate Middleton, Duchess of Cambridge, this summer.

The new law would ensure that if the first royal baby is a girl, she will become heir to the throne rather than have to yield to a male sibling.

The bill would also change a law passed in 1701, when a French invasion aimed at restoring Catholicism to Protestant England seemed certain, that stipulates that the British monarch cannot marry a Roman Catholic.

Prince Charles, who is next in line to the throne, has expressed concern about the proposed changes, according to unnamed friends who briefed a royal watcher at the *Daily Mail*.

The conservative tabloid carried a front-page story on Monday that reflected Charles' anger that the bill was being rushed through the House of Commons without proper consultation with Buckingham Palace.

According to the paper's senior correspondent, Simon Heffer, Charles' main concern is that one of his descendants might marry a Catholic and have a child that is brought up as a Roman Catholic.

Were the child brought up as a Catholic and assumed the throne, there would be a constitutional crisis because the reigning monarch is also Supreme Governor of the established Church of England.

Now, former Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey has entered the arena, telling the House of Lords that Charles' concerns "need to be listened to very carefully."

"The government's instincts to allow female heirs to succeed are wholly right but to avoid any unintended consequences of the proposals for the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church there must be much greater consultation and discussion," Carey said.

The Church of England leader in the House of Lords, the Rt. Rev. Tim Stevens, said Tuesday that the lack of full communion between the Church of England and the Catholic church "effectively renders a Catholic heir incapable of being the Supreme Governor of the Church."

"So clearly that's a more complicated issue than it appears at first sight," Stevens said, adding that any threat to the established status of the Church of England was something bishops "would have to resist."

On Tuesday, Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg dismissed Charles' fears and said "extensive discussions" had taken place with members of the royal household in drafting the proposed bill.

Source URL (retrieved on *12/21/2014 - 23:06*): http://ncronline.org/news/global/british-bishops-resist-move-allow-monarch-marry-catholic