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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

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1 September 1980

Dear Michael,

Nick Sanders' letter of 29 August to George Walden asked us to suggest a draft reply for the Prime Minister to send to Cardinal Hume in reply to the Cardinal's letter of 29 August about the proposed Papal Visit and his intention to issue a press release over the weekend. The reaction in today's papers has been generally very positive.

We suggest that the Prime Minister might thank the Cardinal for keeping her informed about the invitation extended by him to the Pope to pay a pastoral visit to the Roman Catholic community in Great Britain during the summer of 1982. She might add that, as he has recalled, she had made it clear at the time of the Pope's visit to Ireland that he would be a welcome visitor to this country. She is happy to confirm this once again and looks forward to meeting him during the visit. Finally, she might say that she has noted, as regards the timing of the visit, that no precise date during 1982 has yet been decided upon and that she will look forward to hearing from the Cardinal when firm dates have been agreed.

Mike Pattison's letter of 29 August also asked for advice as to the handling of questions about a meeting between the Pope and the Prime Minister, and I understand that Mr Paisley subsequently enquired of No 10 about the involvement of The Queen and the Government in the visit.

/There

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There would of course be no protocol problem about the Prime Minister's receiving the Pope, even though he is to visit this country at the invitation of the Roman Catholic hierarchy (rather than in a State or official capacity). The Pope is accepted by the UK Government as a Head of State and we are in diplomatic relations with that State although the Holy See does not send us a Pro-Nuncio or Nuncio (equivalent to Ambassador). The difficulties which have been raised in certain quarters in regard to the Bill of Rights and Act of Settlement concern only The Queen and the Heir to the Throne. They do not relate in any way to the Prime Minister or any other Member of the Government. And (see above) we are suggesting that the Prime Minister should tell Cardinal Hume that she looks forward to meeting the Pope.

In replying to Mr Paisley the Prime Minister might recall that she had made it clear at the time of the Pope's visit to Ireland that he would be a welcome visitor to this country. As he will have seen the invitation was extended on behalf of the Roman Catholic hierarchy, not of HMG. However, although no detailed arrangements have yet been made it would be natural for the Pope to call on her while he is here. She might add that the question of a call on The Queen will be for consideration nearer the time. These points might also be made by your Press Office as appropriate in response to other questions. I enclose a copy of the Briefing Notes which our News Department will use. You will see that we have deleted the suggestion that the Government was 'consulted' about the invitation.

We shall be writing to you again in due course about the question of Government entertainment for the Pope.

I am sending copies of this letter to Stephen Boys-Smith (Home Office), John Wilson (Scottish Office), Martin Rolfe (Welsh Office), Roy Harrington (Northern Ireland Office) and Barry Hilton (Cabinet Office)

Yours truly
S J Gomersall
S J Gomersall

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