

PROTESTANT REFORMATION SOCIETY

(Founded 1827)

Incorporating the Fellowship of Evangelical Churchmen

Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. *Romans iii. 24.*

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General Secretary:

The Rev. D.N. Samuel, M.A.

Assistant General Secretary:

D.A. Scales, B.A., Ph.D.

EAST RAVENDALE RECTORY
GRIMSBY
SOUTH HUMBERSIDE
DN37 0RX

Tel: 0472-823154

The Rt. Hon. Margaret Thatcher, M.P.,
The Prime Minister,
10, Downing Street,
London, S.W.1.

R119

September 1st., 1980

MADAM,

We the undersigned representatives of certain Protestant Societies and organisations, including the Trinitarian Bible Society, the Protestant Truth Society, the Lord's Day Observance Society, the Grand Orange Lodge of England, the Grand Orange Lodge of Scotland, the National Church Association (Church of Scotland), the Protestant Reformation Society (Church of England), the North-East Diocesan Evangelical Fellowship, and the Sussex Martyrs' Memorial Commemoration Council, present to you this statement in order to make clear that Protestant opinion in this country is strongly opposed to a visit by the Pope, and especially to any suggestion that the Queen and the British Government should be involved.

There are many reasons for the stand we take, most of which have been set out in our pamphlet Ten Reasons why the Pope should not be invited to make a State Visit to Britain, a copy of which accompanies this statement, but chief amongst them is the fact that this is a Protestant country and we believe that not only the membership we represent but most British people would wish it to remain so.

We would respectfully remind you that the titles ascribed to the Bishop of Rome at his installation are: "Father of Princes and Kings, Ruler of the World, and the Vicar of our Saviour Jesus Christ". Such claims and aspirations are repugnant to the teaching of Scripture, yet it is the purpose of the Roman Catholic Church to foster and promote them.

The constitution of our country is such that it forbids the recognition of the claims of the papacy, and the solemn coronation oath to uphold the true Gospel and maintain the Protestant Reformed Religion must preclude any involvement by the Queen and Government in a papal visit to Britain. This would be quite unacceptable and wholly misleading, since it would appear that the Pope was being accorded general acclaim by the British people as a whole.

In view of the statement put out within the last twenty-four hours by the Roman Catholic Church to the effect that Cardinal Hume has invited the Pope to visit Britain as his guest for the purpose of a pastoral visit to the Roman Catholic community in this country, we would like an assurance that, in the event of such a visit taking place, (1) there be no formal or informal ceremonies, events, or receptions connected with the visit, which will imply recognition by the State of the religious and spiritual claims of the Papacy; and (2) the visit be not used in any way to effect changes in the Protestant Laws and Constitution of this country or to bring about changes in the doctrines and principles of the Protestant Reformed Religion of the Established Church.

We wish to take this opportunity of expressing our loyal devotion to Her Majesty

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the Queen. The Protestant Faith, based upon the rule and authority of the Bible alone, was, and is, the source of this country's strength and freedom. Its neglect has been the cause of our weakness, but what has been neglected has not necessarily been cast away. A fresh appreciation of our spiritual heritage, not a visit by the Pope, is the only means by which the faith of our nation can be restored.

In making this statement of our views known to you, we also have the full support of the Free Church of Scotland, the Council of the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches, the Scottish Reformation Society, the Reformed Presbyterian Church, the Evangelical Protestant Society, and the Protestant Alliance.

Deprived P.R.S.

R.W. Burrows. P.R.S.

J. Mann Deputy Grand Master LOYAL ORANGE INSTITUTION ENGLAND
Magnus Bam Grand Orange Lodge of Scotland

Les. David Green, Obiston, Grand Orange Lodge of Scotland.

Ronald Whynes Honorary Deputy Grand Master ENGLAND

Edmund Lambhill, Durham Diocesan Evangelical Union. LOYAL ORANGE INSTITUTION

John Shearer. The Rectory, Nuffield, Herby. Thur. (P.R.S.)

John Barry Shucksmith Cape Cottage, Barton-on-Umber, S. Humberside (P.R.S.)

Alvinet (Secretary) Protestant Truth Society

D. F. Strong. (Committee) Protestant Truth Society.

Godfr. W. Legg (Chairman, Sussex Martyrs Commemorative Council)

Mr. M. Pherson, Trinitarian Bible Society

G. J. Collins Trinitarian Bible Society

Arthur. Lords Day Abstinence Society

D. F. Fountain Trinitarian Bible Society

DA Scales, Protestant Reformation Society

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John MacLennan

National Church Association
Church of Scotland.

O.R.D. Wallis

Sussex Martyrs Commemorative
Council

Martin Garner The Vicarage Burton in Kendal

Sec. English Church Tracts.

64 MILL

BOND

EXTRA STRENGTH

TEN REASONS

WHY THE POPE SHOULD NOT BE INVITED TO MAKE A STATE VISIT TO BRITAIN

In stating our reasons why the Pope should not visit Britain, as has been suggested in some quarters, we wish to make it clear that we bear no ill-will towards Roman Catholics. We believe, however, that it is our duty to speak plainly of the religious and moral system that the Pope represents. For four hundred years our country has shown that this is not a system we wish to embrace. We have our national Protestant and Reformed Church of England, whose teachings are distinct from those of Rome on many basic questions. The distinctive character of the faith we believe and the way of life we follow should not be compromised by moral pressure to unite with the Roman Catholic Church, or submerged under a wave of sentimentality generated by the media. A visit by the Pope would undoubtedly be used in these ways as a lever for change. We, therefore, call upon the Queen and her Government and the Archbishop of Canterbury not to extend an invitation to the Pope to visit this country.

First, the Pope is a controversial figure. He is the head of the Roman Catholic Church. But he also claims to be the Vicar of Christ and the head of all Christians, not just Roman Catholics. As Protestants, we reject both these claims. The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit is the Vicar of Christ, and we do not accept the authority of the Pope, but that of Scripture, as the sixth Article of the Church of England teaches. An official visit by the Pope would mean that he would be granted an audience with the Queen and accorded an importance which would misrepresent the true position in relation to the Church and faith of this nation. This would be quite unacceptable and wholly misleading for it would appear that he was being accorded general acclaim by the British people as a whole.

Secondly, the denial of human rights by the Vatican. The Holy Office, formerly the Inquisition, is responsible for discipline in the Roman Catholic Church. At present it has arraigned Professor Hans Küng of Tübingen University for teaching heresy. Professor Küng refused to appear before the Holy Office in Rome because, he said, its procedures are unjust. The same body is both judge and prosecution. The defendant is not told beforehand the charges to be brought against him. The files are kept secret. 'A common criminal has more rights than a Catholic theologian', he says. 'How can the Church ask for human rights in the world when there are not the most elementary human rights in the Church?' He considers that his case is a striking parallel to that of Andrei Sakharov, the leading Soviet dissident (*The Times*, January 28, 1980).

We are not concerned here with the question of whether Professor Küng teaches heresy or not. We are concerned, however, that elementary justice should be practised by those who call themselves followers of Christ. In the past Rome had a short and easy method with 'heretics'. It would appear that in principle the approach to the problem has not changed. We cannot welcome to this country the chief representative of a church in which the principles of natural justice are thus set aside.

Thirdly, the Roman Catholic Church's refusal to excommunicate the I.R.A. The Pope's visit to Eire last year was widely covered on television and in the press, and many people set much store by it in the hope that it would influence events there in the direction of peace. Despite the Pope's general condemnation of violence no noticeable change in the incidence of violence has taken place. It is business as usual for the I.R.A. When the Pope was asked about the excommunication of members of the I.R.A. as a contribution of the Roman Church to peace, he answered, 'No, No, No!' We must judge for ourselves the reason for this refusal to take what appears to be an obvious step towards bringing some measure of tranquillity to the people of Northern Ireland. In a sermon in March 1980 in Westminster Roman Catholic Cathedral Cardinal Archbishop Tomas O'Fiaich appealed to Roman Catholics on the mainland of Britain to exert their influence upon their fellow countrymen to accept the goal of a united Ireland (*The Times*, March 17, 1980). He reminded the congregation of the words of 'the Holy Father' (the Pope) at Drogheda in September 1979: 'Every human being has inalienable rights that must be respected [*sic*] . . . As long as injustices exist . . . true peace will not exist'. Mr. Enoch Powell described these and other remarks of the Pope at the time as a charter for terrorists.

Fourthly, Rome's unjust treatment of minorities. Little is heard of the plight of the Protestant minority in Eire. They engage in no terrorist activities, no violent protests against their unjust treatment. Yet it is a fact that they have suffered considerably as a result of the harsh limitations imposed by the Roman Catholic Church upon the Protestant partner in a mixed marriage. The rule of the Roman Church requires that the children of such a marriage be brought up as Roman Catholics. This has led to the inevitable decline of the Protestant population of southern Ireland and must eventually cause its eclipse. It is impossible to reconcile this state of affairs with the Pope's words about human rights and the dignity of the individual which cannot be set aside 'whether in the political, social, cultural . . . or religious sphere'. Such words sound hollow in this context, and suggest that their interpretation must be always and only in the direction that favours the Roman Catholic Church.

Fifthly, the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. The doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church contains many things both superstitious and incredible, such as, that the priest performs a miracle at the mass by making the bread and wine into the actual body and blood of Christ, and that the Pope can utter infallible pronouncements. These things are not only unsupported by the teaching of Scripture but are also contrary to reason. There is no reason why the head of a body which teaches such things should be given special recognition and official welcome in this country, any more than the head of the Church of the Divine Light should, who also claims to be infallible. There is no basis at all for the Pope's being officially received by the Queen and representatives of the Government, but rather such a reception would have an element of the bizarre about it.

Our Queen, as the representative of her people, has solemnly pledged herself, and therefore the nation, to uphold the Protestant Reformed Religion, as by law established, to maintain the laws of God and the true Gospel. If the Coronation oath is to mean anything at all, it must surely preclude a state welcome for the Pope, who embodies in his person claims which are the negation of these solemn pledges.

Sixthly, the British constitution. There is little that is written into the constitution of this country, but that which declares plainly that we shall be ruled by a Protestant Monarch, and that the heir to the throne shall not marry a Roman Catholic. This constitution has served us well and preserved the peace over many centuries. The Sovereign must be the Supreme Governor of the Church of England. The law as it stands is, therefore, proper and reasonable. But in recent years there has been considerable pressure from Roman Catholic sources for change. Much of it has been carried on behind the scenes. We do not like such back-door diplomacy. There are rumours at the present time of a secret deal between the British Government and the Vatican, viz., the granting of full diplomatic status to the Pope's representative in London, in exchange for a dispensation from the Pope for Prince Charles to marry a Roman Catholic without the commitment to bring up the children of the marriage as Roman Catholics. We hope that these rumours are unfounded for such secret manoeuvring would reflect little credit upon our Government. We hope that Prince Charles does not entertain any plans to marry a Roman Catholic, since the law does not permit it. It is unthinkable that the law should be changed to enable the heir to the throne to become, or to marry, a Roman Catholic, for then the monarch would cease to be a non-controversial figure. The bearing of all this on any proposed visit to this country by the Pope must be very clear. We cannot welcome the head of the Roman Catholic Church when that Church seeks such radical change in our constitution.

Seventhly, the illiberalism of Rome. Few thoughtful Christians would deny that the too great freedom in morality, or 'permissiveness', that has been brought about in our society in recent years has been harmful. On the other hand, few would wish to live in a Roman Catholic dominated state like the Republic of Ireland where contraception and abortion are illegal under any circumstances whatsoever. We must not evade the issue. There is a fundamental cleavage between the Protestant and Roman Catholic ethic on these questions. The Protestant, while he does not condone the excesses of permissiveness, does not condemn contraception within marriage or desire that abortion to save a mother's life should be illegal. The Roman Catholic Church sets its face adamantly against both. Where the Roman Catholic Church is in control it seeks to remove both. Few people in this country, including many Roman Catholics, would welcome such a system.

Eighthly, consider all those who have suffered as a result of the persecutions conducted by the Roman Catholic Church. As the Jews can never forget those of their race who suffered in Germany, nor the Poles their fellow countrymen who were massacred at Katyn, so we can never forget the thousands of Protestants who were put to death by the Roman Catholic Church. The memory of their suffering and sacrifice must be kept alive, not to ferment hostility between Catholic and Protestant, but to prevent such a thing happening again; to preserve us from the creation of a single totalitarian world Church, which was the source and origin of such persecution; to teach us to value our religion and our freedom; and because to forget those who suffered would be unworthy. It is doubtful whether the Roman Catholic Church has ever fully appreciated the enormity of some of its persecutions in view of its continued practice of canonizing men and women who took an active part in the subversive plotting and political intrigue of the counter-Reformation in this country, which was directed against its legitimate sovereign and parliament.

Ninthly, recent pretentious claims made on behalf of Roman Catholicism. On several occasions recently it has been claimed that the Roman Church is now the leading church in this country and even that England is really a Roman Catholic country. Calls have been made for the disestablishment of the Church of England, the most recent in *The Times* by an Irish Roman Catholic priest writing from Dublin! We realize that not all Roman Catholics are responsible for, or share in, these claims, but we have little doubt that the hierarchy itself does not exactly disapprove of them. England, it is said, is Mary's dowry. Such strident claims, however, are premature. Britain is not a Roman Catholic country. Those who assert this overreach themselves. No opportunity should be given by a state visit of the Pope, and its attendant public ceremonies, to feed this illusion.

Lastly, we do not know what the Pope is really like. There may be those who would agree very largely with what we have said, but may still insist that we should welcome the man not his office. He is a good man, they say, with personal charm and winning ways and we should welcome him for that alone. But very few people know the man. The image we have is that projected by the public relations men and the media. Most of us know nothing at first hand at all. Nowadays it is so easy for a particular image to be created of a man that people imagine they know what he is like, when in fact they know nothing. The facts revealed about the late President Kennedy, after his death, belie the image created of him when he was alive. Public relations techniques are very much the same everywhere. We do not know Pope John Paul II, or what he is really like. We do, however, know his office, and the system religious, ethical, and political for which he stands. These latter are sufficient for us to say in answer to the question, Shall the Pope be invited to pay a state visit to Britain?—'No, No, No!'