

PRIME MINISTER

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The Pope's Visit and UK/Vatican Relations

The Pope will be here at the end of May. Last month's announcement of the upgrading of our diplomatic relations with the Vatican has triggered off some of the disquiet about the visit which has been lying not far below the surface. This has taken a number of forms; the leaders of the Free Churches wrote to the Foreign Secretary to protest about the decision (and the lack of consultation with them), arguing that what was described as a pastoral visit was beginning to take on political proportions. There were some Questions in the House, and there have been quite a number of letters of protest to you and the Foreign Secretary from individuals and from the various Protestant societies. Given the Government's stance that the upgrading was a diplomatic step, without constitutional and ecclesiastical implications, we have been asking the FCO to handle all of these. I am, however, submitting separately a letter to you from Mr Michael Morris MP, who says that several of his constituents have protested to him about the visit.

Lord Carrington has assured the Free Church leaders that the upgrading was an exclusively diplomatic matter, which the Government do not regard as having any religious significance at all. He said that his consultations had been confined to the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Moderator of the Church of Scotland in recognition of the special position of the two established Churches.

You may have seen that the Archbishop of Canterbury and Cardinal Hume, both obviously worried by the way things have been going, have

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been speaking this week to try to allay some of the anxiety and to improve the atmosphere for the visit.

Much of this protest was to be expected. It has to be acknowledged that the Government's attempt to disassociate the upgrading from the visit did not wholly succeed. Some of the protesters, however, have simply been using the upgrading as a pretext for their dislike, often bigoted, of the Papacy. The ecumenical side of the visit does not look very promising, with the Free Churches restless and feeling threatened. Enthusiasm in the Church of England is limited to the Anglo-Catholic wing, although the Archbishop of Canterbury told me this week that he is reasonably happy with the agreed arrangements for the Pope's visit to Canterbury on Saturday 29 May. He said that he would be writing to invite you to Canterbury for the service - Mr Whitmore doubts whether you should go, but you may think that one senior Minister ought to be there for the Government.

*I think this would be unwise*

I am not well placed to judge how far the Catholics are looking forward to the visit. Quite a lot of them seem to have reservations, but no doubt they will turn out in force and affection when the time comes.

Mr Coles and I do not think there is any scope or need for the Government to change its stance towards the visit; the need to balance courtesy and warmth with caution not to be too forthcoming has not changed. Hopefully, the immediate flurry of protest caused by the upgrading will soon die down; and one can only hope that the

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Pope and his officials will be sensitive about his visit to a country which, for them, has a very unusual Church history both past and present.

CVP

Prime Minister.

It is precisely because of the need to maintain the balance which Mr Pakenham talks of in his last paragraph above that I have reconsidered now you going to Canterbury for the same time. You will of course be attending the reception at Archbishop's House later the same day and, in effect, having an audience with the Pope on that occasion. I am inclined to think that that is enough, given that the visit is a pastoral one.

John

19 Feb

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