

SUBJECT



10 DOWNING STREET

ccs FCO Vatican
CO
Sir M Palliser
Mr Ingham
Mr Catford

From the Principal Private Secretary

25 May 1982

Dear John,

VISIT OF THE POPE

Following the Cabinet's discussion this morning on the forthcoming visit of the Pope the Prime Minister spoke to the Archbishop of Canterbury on the telephone.

She said that when doubt had been raised some days ago about whether the Falklands situation would allow the Pope to go ahead with his visit to this country, Ministers had authorised our Ambassador to the Vatican to make it clear that if it would help the Pope to carry out the visit, they were ready to take no official part in his programme. This had seemed to be the most helpful thing that the Government could do to ensure that the visit was not cancelled. By the beginning of this week we had still not heard whether the Vatican were going to accept this offer, and so Sir Michael Palliser saw Cardinal Hume to inquire what response Ministers could expect from Rome. The Cardinal had said that he expected the visit to go ahead and that the Government's offer had been of considerable help in this respect. The latest position was that the visit would now take place. Archbishop Worlock had said as much on his return from Rome the previous day, and she understood that Cardinal Hume proposed to issue a press statement to that effect later that day. We expected his press announcement to include the following paragraph about the decision that Ministers should not be involved in the Pope's programme:-

"One of the factors which has influenced our recommendation that the visit should go ahead was the suggestion on the part of the British Government that in order to avoid the introduction of political issues and to emphasise the pastoral nature of the visit British Ministers should not be officially involved in the programme. We have welcomed this suggestion since we believe that it is indeed right to concentrate on the pastoral character of the visit and the programme has been adjusted accordingly".

The Prime Minister said that this decision meant that no Ministers would attend the service to be held in Canterbury Cathedral on Saturday 29 May. She knew what a disappointment this would be for Dr Runcie. Nonetheless, the Prince of Wales would still attend the service, and she was encouraging the Speaker, who had sought her advice, to be present on the grounds that he did not occupy a political office in the same sense that Ministers did. There would be no change in the arrangements for the Pope to pay a courtesy call upon The Queen on Friday 28 May. She repeated that she knew how disappointed the Archbishop would be to have no Ministers present at the service at Canterbury but she was sure that he would understand.

Dr Runcie said that he did indeed understand why the Government had taken the view that it had, though he had hoped that attending the service in Canterbury Cathedral would not be regarded as the same as meeting the Pope. He was glad that it would still be possible for the Prince of Wales and the Speaker to be present. Would Members of Parliament be able to attend ?

The Prime Minister said that backbench MPs were not part of the Government and it would therefore be perfectly acceptable for them to go to the service. Nor would there be any inhibition placed on junior Ministers who were Roman Catholics, if they wished to attend the Canterbury service in a personal capacity. As regards other occasions in the Pope's programme such as the reception at Archbishop's House, members of the Cabinet would not attend these either. Nor would Ministers be present when the Pope arrived at Gatwick, Cardiff and Glasgow. She herself, for example, would not see the Pope at all during his time in Britain.

Dr Runcie thanked the Prime Minister for this clear explanation of the Government's approach. If he was asked by the media, he would say that he fully understood why the Government did not feel able to be represented at the service in Canterbury Cathedral, although he would mention that there was no reason why Ministers and other Members of Parliament should not be in the congregation in a personal capacity.

I am sending copies of this letter to Brian Fall (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and David Wright (Cabinet Office). A copy also goes to Michael Palliser (Cabinet Office).

Yours sincerely,

John Halliday

John Halliday Esq.,
Home Office.