

J.A. Personal

5 April 1984

My dear Archbishop,

Thank you for your letter of 26 March about Lord Sudeley's Prayer Book Protection Bill and his proposal, if the Bill is given a Second Reading, for it to be referred to a Select Committee.

As you say in your letter, when Lord Sudeley last introduced a Bill of this kind, the Lord Chancellor made very clear the Government's opposition on constitutional grounds to such a Measure. The Government's position on this issue remains unchanged, as I made clear on 15 March in answer to a Question from Mr Greenway in the House of Commons. In case you have not seen it, I enclose an extract from the official report. It follows from our views on the substantive issue that we would regard it as equally objectionable for this Bill to be referred to a Select Committee for the very reasons you give in your letter.

This is, however, a situation in which there is a limit to the effective action the Government can take. It is the normal convention that Governments do not seek to make proposals which are raised by private Peers the subject of Party discipline. We shall, therefore, as in 1981, again make clear the strength of the Government's opposition both to the principle of the Bill and to the proposal to refer it to a Select Committee. In view of the strength of feeling shown by the vote on the earlier occasion, however, there must clearly be some uncertainty as to the outcome

/of the debate

of the debate on these latest proposals.

You will therefore, I am sure, appreciate the importance of the Church of England doing all it can to muster sufficient support for its own position. In this connection, I am sure the Church authorities will wish to consider very seriously the strength of feeling which has led to the introduction of these proposals by Lord Sudeley and the support they have received and to consider whether there may not be real concessions to offer which will diminish the strength of feeling which has evidently been generated.

Yours sincerely,

Margaret Thatcher

His Grace The Lord Archbishop of York